The Margravine of Baireuth and Voltaire

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

H.R.H. PRINCESS CHRISTIAN OF SCHLESWIG HOLSTEIN

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MARGRAVINE OF BAIREUTH

AND

VOLTAIRE

BY

DR. GEORGE HORN

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY

HER ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCESS CHRISTIAN

OF SCHLESWIG HOLSTEIN

PRINCESS OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

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TO

MY DEAR HUSBAND

THIS TRANSLATION

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

PREFACE.

A few months ago Dr. George Horn of Berlin, sent me an interesting little volume, containing the correspondence (published for the first time) between the Margravine of Baireuth and the great French author Voltaire. The letters were interspersed with explanatory remarks and comments on them. It struck me that a translation of this volume would be a fitting sequel to that of the curious Memoirs of the Margravine, published lately by me. Having obtained the necessary permission, I now venture to make public my effort, trusting it may meet with as kind a reception as the previous one alluded to. I am quite aware that the volume is open to the criticism that it contains some repetition of matter to be found in the Memoirs, but it should be remembered that the repetition, if such has occurred, was necessary to explain certain subjects to which the letters refer. The correspondence besides, stretches over that period of the Margravine's life, of which she herself gives no account and gives us a fuller and more varied insight into her character.

In her Memoirs she often appears harsh and embittered, whilst her letters prove her to have been a large-hearted

and generous-minded woman, who forgot her own misfortunes in her solicitude for others.

Voltaire's letters are both graceful and witty, and whilst showing his capacity for true devotion and friendship, he yet maintains throughout them that egotism and vanity which have always characterized him.

I have endeavoured to translate the letters as literally as possible, but as the book was written for Germany, I have been obliged to make the translation a free one, adhering however throughout, strictly to the sense. I have entirely omitted some passages as being of no interest to English readers.

Cumberland Lodge,
May, 1888.

THE MARGRAVINE OF BAIREUTH AND VOLTAIRE.

I.

During the eighteenth century Germany, or rather the Holy Roman Empire, was broken up into many small principalities, numbering about three hundred. However great was the mischief wrought to the German people by the shattering of this great territory, so much the greater on the other hand was the benefit its intellectual development derived therefrom. The German nation had since the Thirty Years' War sunk into complete apathy as regarded higher and nobler interests, and it required some stimulus of an intellectual nature to rouse it. This was given by these tiny Courts. The principalities were small, there was little to do in them, and the leisure thus naturally resulting, in a great measure, was the cause of many of the German Courts of the eighteenth century, and especially the less important ones, becoming the seats of science and learning, and spreading their healthy influence over the nation. With many of these princes the cultivation of literature and art may in part have been in imitation of Louis XIV. Every one fancied himself imbued with some of his genius, and was anxious to walk in his footsteps in this direction, though unable to emulate his greatness and splendour.

Of those, however, possessed of capabilities of a higher order, it was the innate desire to extricate themselves from the national degradation to which Germany had sunk, and to take refuge in the vast sphere of intellectual culture. Germany had at that time no literature of its own of any importance, such as is now the case. French was spoken and written at all German Courts, to which the society of the scientific and learned was almost entirely confined. French literature reigned supreme. This could not be called national progress, but it laid the seeds for future intellectual development.

Next to Rheinsberg and later on Sans Souci, the Court of the Margrave Frederic of Brandenburg-Baireuth held a foremost place as regards science and learning, due almost entirely to the influence of his wife, Frederica Wilhelmine, Princess of Prussia. She was Frederic the Great's favourite sister, and she was a worthy object of so great a man's affection. For twenty-three years the Court of a country numbering only 200,000 inhabitants rivalled those of other great countries in intellectual importance and renown. The Margravine was the magnet which attracted all that was greatest and most celebrated, all that was most worthy of esteem and consideration. Much of the evidence of the Margravine's intercourse with her great contemporaries has been lost, but one of the most interesting pieces has yet been preserved to us, and we feel it a duty to make it public.

Among the papers of the family of F. von Miedel, in Baireuth, the author found an old manuscript, yellow with age, on the title-page of which stood written in large characters, "Letters from Voltaire."

After comparing the handwriting of this title-page with that of the copy of the Memoirs kept in the Royal Library at Berlin, there was no doubt that it was that of the Margravine. This manuscript contained nothing less than twenty-five unpublished letters of the celebrated writer to

the Princess, and one to the Marquis d'Adhémar. These letters are all in Voltaire's own small and original handwriting, and read now like thrusts from a dagger, now like arrows shot from Cupid's bow, and each yet unmistakable in its originality, even where the writer seems most desirous of combining the beauty of his mind with the elegance of his handwriting, in order to do honour to the King's daughter.

This same manuscript contained also twelve autograph letters from Baron von Pölnitz to the Margravine. Who is there who has not heard of him and of his amusing and often times spiteful descriptions of persons and courts of his time? There were few sovereigns whom he had not served, and there was scarcely any Court in Europe which he had not visited. He had acquired his knowledge of the French language whilst a light-hearted page at the Court of the Duchess Elizabeth-Charlotte of Orleans, in Paris and at Versailles. He then served three Prussian kings, as Master of the Ceremonies and Chamberlain; changed his faith three times, and remained true to that one only which allowed that he was the most intellectual and amusing of courtiers, and that a man, especially if he were called Pölnitz, required much money.

The witty gossip of the Prussian Chamberlain, together with the Memoirs of the Margravine of Baireuth, are still the best source for studies of German Court life during the early part of the eighteenth century. The reader will therefore observe that the letters from Baron von Pölnitz (which are given together with those from Voltaire) throw many a side light on Voltaire's relations to the Knights of the Round Table of Sans Souci.

Pölnitz was well aware how best to use his pen and his wit. In order to fill his generally empty purse, he wrote descriptions of festivities given, and journeys made by the Prussian Court, the copies of which he then sent in the form of Memoirs, to the different absent members of the Prussian

Royal Family. This was at all times a profitable transaction, as he had ample compensation given him for the outlay in pens and ink.

Such a Memoir, relating to the journey of the Queen Mother to Oranienburg and Rheinsberg, was likewise found with the manuscript, accompanied by a few lines in the writer's own hand. The copy of a play which was acted in honour of the Margravine of Baireuth's birthday, at her country seat, the Hermitage, on the 3rd of July, 1744, was amongst these papers. According to a marginal note on the index of the manuscript, this piece was supposed to have been written by Voltaire, but we have no confirmation of this supposition. There were also found three autograph letters from La Bruyère, written from Naples and Rome in the years 1743 and 1744.

The chief interest of our discovery, however, belongs to Voltaire's letters. They date from 1742 to 1758. How the Von Miedels became possessed of these papers has never been explained. The words written on the outer sheet, and which might have cleared up the mystery, had evidently been effaced with a purpose; only three words could be deciphered, and these would lead one to suppose that after the death of the Margravine, the manuscript had been taken to Stuttgard. It undoubtedly became the property of the Margravine's only child Frederica, wife of Duke Charles of Wurtemberg—the same Prince by whose tyrannical behaviour Schiller's genius was so early matured. The Duchess of Wurtemberg died at Baireuth in 1780, separated from her husband, after an unhappy married life. Tradition says she died in consequence of a vegetable poison, which she had used daily for the purpose of preserving her complexion.

Her personal property, amongst it her library which no doubt contained our manuscript, was sold by auction, and was probably bought by a member of the family of Von Miedel, who was Chamberlain at the Court of Baireuth, and

possessed of literary and artistic tastes. For more than a century Voltaire's letters to the Margravine lay buried and unknown, whilst the corresponding letters from the Margravine to Voltaire had already been published in several editions of his own works, more especially in that edited by Beuchot. Those from Voltaire, with the exception of two which were printed in Volume VII of this writer's correspondence, were believed to be lost. Yet it was but a century's dust which hid them.

The published letters of the Margravine receive in a great measure their real meaning and importance from their connection with those of Voltaire. Read together, the whole picture stands complete before us, as does many a beautiful mosaic dug out in parts from its grave of centuries. It represents the relations existing not only between the poet and the Margravine, but also between them on the one hand, and Frederic the Great on the other; an intellectual union, the interest in which becomes deepened the more truly the three great personages who formed it are brought before us.

The style in which letters were written in the eighteenth century is different to that of the present day. Then ideas predominated, whilst now facts form the ground work. Then is to be observed the desire of soaring above the confused social conditions, and the unthinking, unpoetic, realistic life, into the sunshine of a life of thought. The aim of writers of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, is to beautify and glorify the events of real life with its ideal acquisitions. This is in great measure the reason why we found so few real facts contained in the letters written in the last century, and so much philosophic reasoning, self-conceit, fine words,and self-glorification. In times like our own, truthfulness is what is aimed at, though oftentimes expressed in terms somewhat more rough and inconsiderate than of old. Yet even those who lived in the times of powder and paint were unable to entirely hide their real nature when anything

touched them nearly. Their joy or sorrow, enthusiasm or indignation, broke through the artificial barriers, and they showed themselves as they were, and not as they wished to appear.

We should destroy the interest in the following pages, were we to say that this short criticism on letter writing during the eighteenth century had no connection with the correspondence now before us. The reader will be the best judge of this. Voltaire and Frederic the Great were not only men of their day, but they were the two great landmarks of it, and in fact represented their time; Wilhelmine sharing her brother's intellectual superiority. Although the letters contain nothing startling in their novelty, yet they will perhaps place Voltaire's relations to the great king in a clearer light.

Voltaire's writings gained their importance chiefly through the influence they exercised on that period, and not owing to any innate beauty such as rendered those of Shakespeare, Corneille, and Goethe immortal. Nevertheless, the interest felt in his personality, and in the opinions expressed in his letters, will long outlive his tragedies, comedies, novels, historical works and poems, with the exception of his madrigals.

The following letters show Voltaire partly in a new light, as possessed of amiable and tender feelings, of an enthusiastic and sincere devotion for a woman, who certainly was one of the most gifted and remarkable persons of her own rank and time.

No one escaped Voltaire's biting sarcasm, nothing was holy to him, and yet before this woman his love of mockery seemed to have died within him, his respect for people to have returned, and he seemed to have become imbued with kindly feelings towards all mankind.

Not Voltaire alone, but also the Margravine is presented to us in a different light to that in which she generally appears.

In these days when so much stress is laid on family affections, she has, so to speak, fallen into discredit by the inconsiderate manner in which she refers to her family in her Memoirs. Certainly the bitter animosity with which Wilhelmine speaks of her Royal parents can in no way be justified, though, when one has read the account of her sad childhood, it is to be understood. In those days the general desire to appear intellectual prevailed, even at the expense of the most sacred feelings. For the sake of making a witty remark or an appropriate *bon mot* no mercy was shown, not even to those entitled to consideration. Even though this mania represented but a style affected in society and in reality not so pernicious as it might appear, yet it was not calculated to promote the kindlier feelings in human nature or strengthen family affection. Wilhelmine suffered from the prevailing evil. It must also be taken into account that her Memoirs were not intended for publication. They were the unrestrained outpouring of her heart, besides which, they were written at a period in her life when the suppressed grief at the loss of her husband's affections made the events of her troubled childhood appear darker and more bitter than they would otherwise have done.

Although she may have been guilty of some inaccuracies and exaggerations, yet these certainly were unintentional on her part. The Margravine was endowed with the nervous sensitiveness of her century, and she was irritable to a degree. She was but a woman, and, as such, wrote on the impulse of the moment. This, in great measure, proves that she was anything but heartless or unfeeling, as historians generally represent her. These and all other accusations which may be made against her, are more than counterbalanced by the heroism of that love she showed her brother in the hours of his greatest need, an affection so great and strong that her feeble frame sunk under it.

The Margravine Frederica Sophie Wilhelmine of Branden-

burg-Baireuth was the eldest daughter of King Frederic William I of Prussia, and was born in Berlin 3rd July 1709. On November 20th, 1731, she was married to the hereditary Prince of Brandenburg-Baireuth (her cousin being one of the Franconian Hohenzollern line), who became Margrave in 1735. This marriage was to a certain extent an act of desperation on Wilhelmine's part. Who is there who is not acquainted with that catastrophe in Frederic the Great's childhood, that terrible tragedy enacted in a Royal family.

The old alliance between the Hohenzollerns and the Guelphs was, now that the cheery Elector of Hanover had become the grave and constitutional King of England, to be re-established on a new and firmer footing. To attain this end, the well-known project of a double marriage had been planned, according to which Wilhelmine was to marry her cousin, the son of the Prince of Wales afterwards George II, and the Prussian Crown Prince, Princess Amelia of England. The Queen of Prussia, daughter of George I of England, a proud and ambitious woman, revelled in this plan. She looked on it as a settled matter, all the more so as her husband, the rough, uneducated, and yet straightforward, practical King Frederic William I was not adverse to it. He felt satisfied that he need give his daughter no marriage portion nor increase his son's income. For these reasons the King was quite satisfied. Wilhelmine, Queen of England ! ! Everything had been arranged by the Queen in anticipation of this event, but she had forgotten the House of Hapsburg. Would not such a close alliance between these two Protestant powers be a source of continual danger to this Imperial House ? Although England would not be so much to be feared, yet there was Prussia. The House of Hapsburg had always looked with suspicion and distrust on this "new kingdom," with its Puritanical Court, its well-ordered finances, and tall soldiers.

Would not the protectorship, already exercised by Prussia with such effect over the oppressed imperial Protestant subjects, eventually become a great power; and would Prussia not one day throw down the gauntlet to the House of Hapsburg and wrest the imperial crown from its head? Not that visible crown which was kept in the Cathedral at Aix-la-Chapelle, but the invisible one, which the newly awakened national spirit places upon him who realizes its longings, feelings, and thoughts. For this reason these marriages must not take place. It was, therefore, necessary that those about the King who were for Austria, and who stood in its pay, should do their utmost to sow the seeds of dissatisfaction and suspicion in his mind. They must endeavour to arouse and keep alive his displeasure and anger, chiefly against those who were nearest and dearest to him, his wife and children, but especially against Wilhelmine and the Crown Prince. The two Austrian agents, Grumkow and Seckendorf, succeeded so well in their machinations, that they finally brought about a catastrophe such as to fill even them with horror and dread, viz., the unsuccessful attempt at flight by the Crown Prince, and the sentence of death subsequently passed on him and his accomplice, Katte, by a special order from the King.

Katte had to die before the eyes of the Crown Prince. It was with the greatest difficulty that the King was prevented, by the earnest representations of foreign courts and influential people, from insisting on his son's execution. Amongst those who helped to prevent it, was the energetic Madame de Kamke, the Queen's Mistress of Robes. She had the courage to address the enraged King as follows: "You have prided yourself hitherto on being a just, righteous, and God fearing Prince. God has rewarded you by showering untold blessings on you. Tremble to depart from His holy laws, and fear the divine wrath. It has already punished two Sovereigns who, in the same manner as you are about to do, shed the blood

of their own sons. Philip II and Peter the Great both died without male heirs. Their countries became the prey to foreign and civil wars, and these two sovereigns, however great they may have been, have become the horror of mankind. Repent Sire. The first outburst of your anger is still pardonable, but it will become criminal if you do not endeavour to control it."

Hapsburg saw its plans crowned with success. The King of Prussia took a decided aversion to the English marriages. The Crown Prince was to receive full pardon and be released from his confinement in the fortress of Kustrin, on condition that the Princess Wilhelmine agreed to marry her Brandenburg cousin, the Hereditary Prince of Baireuth. This sacrifice she was ready to make—for a sacrifice it was to accept a husband whom she did not know, and had not even seen —for the sake of that brother who, from his earliest days, had been the object of her love and care, and for the sake of the peace and happiness of her family. Wilhelmine, to whom the choice of four crowns had been offered, (Sweden, Poland, Russia, and England), married the future Heir to a country which, though prosperous and flourishing, was yet of so small dimensions, that its affairs of state could be settled at breakfast. Her brother, indeed, repaid her for this proof of her devotion by the tenderest affection of which he was capable.

The danger which the Imperial House had apprehended from the English marriages was obviated by these means. Another, greater though unforeseen, had, however, arisen in its stead. The intrigues of the Austrian Court had tended to develop the character of the heir to the Prussian throne. The greater the depths to which these proceeded, the more the strength of his nature matured. He only waited for a favourable moment to make the House of Hapsburg pay the penalty for the sorrows, troubles, and struggles it had caused him. Hapsburg itself had sown the dragon's teeth, and

Silesia became the pearl in Prussia's crown, the price to be paid for Frederic's miserable youth.

Professor Preuss, the well-known historian of the House of Brandenburg and the first authority on Frederic the Great, quotes the following remark which De Catt (Frederic's reader) heard from the King's own lips: "When I was young I never would do anything, but was always running about. My sister of Baireuth said to me, 'Are you not ashamed so to neglect your talents?' I then took to my books."

It was Wilhelmine, therefore, who first roused in her brother that desire for mental culture, the results of which, in its varied aspects, has distinguished him for all ages. The sister, in all probability, was more remarkable than the brother through the influence of her writings, not alone in philosophical speculations, but also in her love for what was highest and noblest in art. A few words are often sufficient for her to give a true and withal grotesque picture of people.

Those who are acquainted with the character of King Frederic William I, and his abhorrence for all art and learning, cannot but be surprised that his eldest daughter had nevertheless received an education so far superior to that which was generally given to royal princesses in those days. The King troubled himself but little about the education of his daughters. That which he looked upon as a danger to his son, and tried in every way to prevent, he let pass by unobserved in his daughter, all the more so as she was destined to be Queen of England. He at least respected in Wilhelmine the likeness to his mother, Sophie Charlotte, the friend and admirer of the celebrated Leibnitz. She also had founded the Academy of Arts and Sciences at Berlin, in imitation of the one in France. Princess Wilhelmine bore out in a striking manner the assertion that great qualities and mental capacities are generally again apparent in the second, and not the first,

descendants of a family. She was the worthy grand-daughter of Sophie Charlotte, and perpetuated the principles of mental culture held by that philosophical Queen. These were fostered in the Princess by her governess, Frl. von Sonnsfeld, former lady in waiting to that Queen. "She taught me what real feeling was," Wilhelmine writes in her Memoirs. "I now did my lessons with delight, and began to take an "interest in literature and reading, which soon became my "favourite occupation. I had an English and an Italian "master added to the others. I was well versed in ancient "and modern history, geography, and the first principles of "philosophy; I understood music thoroughly, and I made "great progress with my studies."

Her zeal for her studies was shared by her brother, with whom she had made learning a point of honour. Frederic came every afternoon to see his sister, and they then read and studied together in order to enlarge their minds and views on all subjects of interest. Wilhelmine certainly occupied the post of teacher, not alone as elder sister, but because she at that time possessed the superior mind of the two. She superintended the education of her younger sisters, and, although but a child, was treated as a grown up person by her parents and their Court.

Fun and jokes were not excluded from these hours of serious study, and the little weaknesses of those around them roused the love of mockery innate in the Princess and her brother. They used Scarron's* humorous novel, by making satires from it applicable to the Imperial party at Court, and were thus enabled before others to amuse themselves at the expense of these hateful personages without its being found out. Grumkow, for instance, was La Rancune, Seckendorf La Rapinière. When the brother and

* Paul Scarron, born 1610 or 1611, died 1660; was Madame de Maintenon's first husband, and a French poet.

sister joked about Madame de Bouvillion, the portly good-natured Frau von Kamke was meant. This lady enquired one day who Madame de Bouvillion was, and the Crown Prince, with a malicious look at his sister, replied, "She was mistress of robes to the Queen of Spain." A short time after this, the conversation turning on the Spanish Court, Frau von Kamke, who had never heard of Scarron's novel, said that all the mistresses of the robes of the Spanish Queen were of the family of Bouvillion. Everybody laughed, and she soon found out that she had made a stupid remark, and had been taken in by the Crown Prince. Even the King was not spared by his children in their satires, for they had assigned to him the part of Le Ragotin. In later years the Margravine heartily repented this want of filial respect. It would be almost impossible rightly to understand the peculiar characteristics of Wilhelmine and Frederic, were one to forget the strange circumstances under which they grew up. These were so entirely opposite to the strict puritanical orthodoxy of the Court, and of the existing state of society and learning of that day.

Frederic William, the Great Elector of Brandenburg, had, after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, allowed the exiled Protestants from France to take refuge in his dominions. A large number of these refugees came to Berlin and there founded the still flourishing French colony. The French brought fresh industries into the country, as well as new ideas and a new spirit altogether. The simple matter of fact people of the province of Brandenburg, who loved to examine everything minutely and to distinguish between reality and fiction, found totally new elements amongst them. The French influence seemed to sharpen their hitherto somewhat phlegmatic natures, and really brought their finer and nobler instincts to light. The German disposition united to French culture supplemented each other. Wilhelmine and her brother, who were born in Brandenburg and educated by

such French emigrants as Madame de Rocoule, Mademoiselle de Montbail, M. Dühan, and La Croze, are the brilliant and striking examples of that German and French fusion. They can be looked upon as the first representatives of that particular school of thought, which as yet stands alone in Germany.

Wilhelmine's and Frederic's first acquaintance with Voltaire's writings (which adorned the first half of the eighteenth century) was made, without doubt, during their secret hours of study. We can picture to ourselves the eagerness with which they read the "Henriade." In what contrast those elegant graceful verses stood to those in the old German Hymn Book, which they were obliged to sing twice each Sunday. What a difference was there in the fine poetry of the "Œdipe" when compared with that of the coarse German comedies, which they were so often forced to witness in the King's presence! What life and fire was there not contained in Voltaire's commentaries on English philosophers! The liberty of thought of such men as Newton, Locke, Pope, stood out brilliantly when contrasted with the narrow-minded orthodox teaching of Pastor Franke, from Halle, whose religious services the Royal children had to attend. In one word, the totally new line of thought disclosed to them was contained in the one name, Voltaire!

The commencement of Frederic the Great's intercourse with the great French author dates from the well known letter of the 8th of August, 1736. This letter contained a complete declaration of his views on modern thought, and closed with an invitation to Rheinsberg. Frederic was only twenty-four years of age at that time. Voltaire felt himself greatly flattered by the homage paid him by the young Prince in this letter. "He is a philosophical Prince, he is a man, and therefore a most rare thing," he wrote to one of his friends. He was naturally at no small pains to make this as public as possible, so that it even got into some German

newspapers. Of these newspapers the "Nuremberg Peace and War Courier" was the most important, and Frederic evidently alludes to its Editor when, in writing to his sister, 3rd February, 1737, he says: "I do not know how I have managed to insinuate myself into the good graces of the 'Nuremberg Courier,' but it does me great honour in crying me up in this manner. I, who am but an ignorant man, and who have no other merit but that of not being blind about myself. Voltaire is corresponding with me, which may have caused people to think that he was coming here." This is the first allusion to the famous author. After a most lively correspondence between the Crown Prince and Voltaire, for a space of four years, the long desired personal acquaintance took place at the Castle of Moyland, near Wesel, in the autumn of 1740. Voltaire found his friend "a small fever stricken man, wrapped in a dressing gown of coarse blue cloth." "Monsieur de Voltaire," announced the servant, as he ushered him into the King's presence. At last the long wished for moment had arrived, and Voltaire was there! "The hope of mankind" and this frail young man, "the Solomon of the North," struck down by fever, are together! Had the King expected to find "the hope of mankind" so feeble and wizen; had the poet pictured to himself "the Solomon of the North" so small a man, with such meagre surroundings? Who can tell! The room in which the King was sitting consisted of four bare walls, lit by a single candle. The demons of fever fled as quickly at the sight of the son of Apollo, as they did four weeks later when the King heard of the death of the last of the Hapsburgs, 26th October, 1740.

Voltaire's second visit followed quickly on the first. On the 21st November of the same year, he again arrived at Rheinsberg, nominally to report on the publication of the "Antimachiavelli," but in reality sent by the French Cardinal Minister Fleury.

The King was having fortresses erected on the Rhine, and this was making the old gentleman in purple, at Paris, unnecessarily uneasy; for, though the King was moving troops to the Rhine, he was thinking of Silesia. The French Envoy at Berlin, Marquis de Beauvean, could gain no information in the matter. What it was impossible for a diplomate to discover, a friend might possibly extract from the King. Voltaire would have been the happiest of mortals could he one day, were it even at the smallest court, be received as Envoy Extraordinary of his most Catholic Majesty. Even towards "the hope of mankind" Frederic maintained his silence on the matter. It was probably to evade the renewed careful enquiries of his friend that the King one evening interrupted their conversation, and taking Voltaire by the hand, led him up to a lady with these words, "I here present you to my beloved sister." This lady was of graceful stature, with a small and delicately-modelled head, a marvellously white and transparent complexion. This lady, whose large blue eyes must have sparkled with enthusiastic interest at beholding the great genius, whose small and generally somewhat mocking mouth must have uttered words of admiration to the learned philosopher in his own tongue, was the Margravine of Baireuth.

Rheinsberg was built by the Crown Prince Frederic. It is situated amidst lakes, small hills, and beechwoods, twelve miles from Berlin. A life of complete freedom, and at the same time of thorough enjoyment, was led there. Here the "nuits blanches" of Sceaux * were repeated, only with this difference, that no conspiracies were formed, excepting against boredom. It was as if Watteau † and Lancret, ‡

* Festivities given at night by the Duchesse du Maine, at Sceaux, a small town south of Paris. Voltaire played a great part in these entertainments as actor.

† Jean Antoine Watteau, famous French painter, born 1684, died 1721.

‡ Nicolas Lancret, French painter, born 1690, died 1743.

with whose works the castle was filled, had hid themselves amongst the bushes and found here the subjects for their pictures. Lakes, gardens, pavilions, grottoes, hermitages, gay cavaliers, beautiful ladies, singing, dancing, and playing, —such were the scenes at Rheinsberg.

When evening comes, with the rough and chilly autumn air so common to that part of Germany, the candles are lit in the Queen's apartments, beautifully decorated by Pesue.* The King, who has all day sat brooding over serious undertakings against the House of Hapsburg, now makes his appearance. The concert begins; the King leads the Margravine to the piano, and then takes his flute. During the pauses between the different pieces, the Margravine holds philosophic and other discussions with Maupertuis,† Algarotti,‡ Jordan, and Keyserling, but chiefly with Voltaire, whose society was so new, interesting, and invigorating.

How many interests these two have in common! One can almost hear the Margravine asking Voltaire what he thought of his relations to the Court of Versailles, of Louis XV, Madame de Pompadour, and Cardinal Fleury; did he prefer Lecouvreur§ to Clairon in tragedy; whose music was the deepest, Hasse‖ or Graun; at what results had he arrived from his studies of Newton; what was his opinion

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* Antoine Pesue, born at Paris, 1684; died at Berlin, 1757; portrait painter.

† Pierre Louis Morraude Maupertuis, celebrated French mathematician, born 1698, died 1759.

‡ Francesco, Count Algarotti, Italian physiologist, born 1712, died 1764.

§ Adrienne Lecouvreur, celebrated French actress, born 1690, died 1730.—Clairon, great French tragedian, born 1723, died 28th January, 1803.

‖ Hasse, German composer, born 1699, died 1783.—Graun, celebrated German composer, born 1701, died 1759.

of Wolff,* her brother's master in philosophy, of Descartes,† whose views she has subscribed to. What delightful, never to be forgotten days; but with them the splendour of Rheinsberg vanished! It was the real Sans Souci of the great King, and, strange to say, he never saw it again in later years.

* Caspar F. Wolff, German anatomist and physiologist, born 1733, died 1794.

† Réné Descartes, famous French philosopher, born 1596, died 1650.

CHAPTER II.

Voltaire spent another fortnight at Berlin with the King and his sister, and then returned to Brussels to the Marquise du Châtelet. Although he left laden with honours, he did so empty handed as regarded any knowledge of Frederic's political plans. The Margravine did not return to Baireuth till after the conquest of Silesia, and Frederic's return to Berlin on June 5th, 1741.

The impressions made on Wilhelmine by her intercourse with Voltaire were lasting ones. A year after a parcel reached Cirey or Brussels, evidently in remembrance of the first meeting. It contained a present, and was accompanied by a letter from the Margravine's private secretary, Mons. de Superville, or "the philosopher Superville," as Voltaire called him. Who was there who was not a philosopher in the eighteenth century? Philosophy was then the fashion as to-day the sciences are, and as everybody deems himself well up in natural physics who knows that fire is not a substance but a power. In this manner all then believed themselves philosophers who had not faith in the biblical devil.

The present sent Voltaire by the Margravine, as well as the letter from her doctor, Superville (the same to whom the latter gave the manuscript of her celebrated Memoirs), received no acknowledgment. It may be that she gave some sign of astonishment, perhaps through M. de Superville. At the beginning of October, the first letter written by the poet himself arrived at the Castle of Baireuth. Voltaire was then at Brussels, where he was in the habit of going from time to time with the Marquise du Châtelet.

He had gone from there to Aix-la-Chapelle to pay his respects to his royal friend, the hero of Mollwitz * and Czaslov.†

> Pity me, thou hast moved in Pallas' train;
> I mourn a terrible mishap to wit:
> That sixty verses in thine honour writ
> Are lost for ever, and beyond regain.
>
> ---
>
> 'Tis sometimes thus, when a poor mortal lies
> With outstretched hands and spirit wrapt in prayer
> At the high Altar's base; then murm'ring tries,
> In accents cold, to raise an anthem there,
> That Satan bars all roads to Paradise,
> And heart's desires are melted into air.

BRUSSELS,
26th Sept., 1742.

Your Royal Highness sees that such is my destiny in regard to herself. About a year ago, I received a very charming little packet from you, accompanied by a letter from the philosopher M. de Superville. I was just starting for Paris when I received this proof of your gracious favour. I call Apollo, the nine muses and the great goddess of gratitude to witness, that during my journey I composed a great number of indifferent verses, to which on my arrival at Paris, I added four pages of prose. This large parcel I myself took to the chief post office in Paris and registered it with such care that they evidently believed that it contained great secrets. The curious will doubtless have been disappointed, but I, Madame, am still more so, through what I learn to-day. I am informed that your Royal Highness has neither received the verses nor the prose; and you have therefore every reason

* The Battle of Mollwitz, fought during the First Silesian War, 10th April, 1741. Frederic the Great's first great victory over the Austrians.

† Battle of Czaslov, fought 17th May, 1742.

to consider me a barbarian, idle and devoid of any knowledge of my first duties.

Do me justice, Madame, consider how impossible it is for me even to forget your many favours, and believe that not only had I done myself the honour of writing to your Royal Highness, but that I would have come to your own country, personally to thank you—had fate permitted me to undertake so pleasant a journey. No, Madame, I shall ever remember the Princess, the Philosopher, the Patron of Art, the accomplished Musician, and the example of perfect courtesy and affability. The King, your most august and amusing brother, commanded me not long ago, to pay him my court at Aix-la-Chapelle. He was well and looking like a hero, making fun of his doctors and taking the baths for his amusement. I found him unaltered, except in face. The last time I saw him, two years ago, it was thin from the effects of fever; it has now grown quite round, which well becomes a crown of laurels. Two more victories have not made him less humane or less amiable. I shall never cease to regret those days when I had the honour of paying my respects to your Royal Highness and to His Majesty, at your retreat at Rheinsberg. The kindness shown to me by the Margrave will ever be present to me, and all that I most desire, is that I may once more be permitted during my life to enjoy the same honour.

I am with the profoundest respect,

Madame,

Of your Your Royal Highness,

The very humble and very obedient

Servant,

VOLTAIRE.

It seemed like the irony of fate that the Margravine should always meet Voltaire when he was suffering from one of his diplomatic paroxysms. The great statesman Richelieu always

desired to be a great poet, whilst the famous author Voltaire aspired to be a distinguished statesman, and consequently both failed signally in what they attempted to be. It was one of these efforts at diplomacy which brought Voltaire to Berlin in August, 1743, for the purpose of inducing Frederic the Great to take part in the Austrian-Bavarian war of succession.* He was to place an army at the disposal of the Elector of Bavaria, the unfortunate German Emperor, Charles VII, and his allies the French Ministers Amelot and Maurepas. The King had however not the slightest intention of meddling in this business. When Voltaire laid his proposals before him, the King laughed at him and suggested that, instead of acting the part of a diplomatic agent, he should accompany him to Baireuth. This indeed was a more fitting occupation for the great author. Frederic had a political project in view, but it was not one which agreed with France's propositions. He wished to form a confederation of German Princes to uphold the weak Charles VII against Austria. For this purpose he made a digression to Anspach, where he hoped to meet the Prince Bishop of Würzburg, in order to sound him as to the views held by the Franconian Princes with reference to his project. Voltaire remained behind at Baireuth. The King could not have ventured to have taken him from the midst of such attractions as were offered to him at the hands of a Royal Lady. There was at Baireuth besides

* After the death of Charles VII, Emperor of Germany, the Elector, Charles Albert of Bavaria, in virtue of his relationship to the Emperor Joseph I, and in consequence of a supposed clause in Emperor Ferdinand I's will, laid claim to the greater part of the Austrian dominions. He made war against Maria Theresa with the help of a French army, had himself crowned King of Bohemia in 1741, and even in 1742 at Frankfort as Emperor of Germany, under the name of Charles VII. The Austrians meanwhile occupied Bavaria. On Charles VII's return to Munich he died, 1745. His son Maximilian III made peace with Austria at Füssen, acknowledged the Pragmatic Sanction and received back his Bavarian territories taken by Austria.

the Margravine, the Duchess of Wurtemberg, who became later on mother-in-law to Wilhelmine's daughter. She was a woman of some cultivation but of rather extraordinary manners, and she spent the nights at Baireuth in secretly making a copy of "La Pucelle." Wilhelmine had assembled numerous young ladies about her, who had probably read less of Voltaire's works than would account for the admiration and courtesy with which they surrounded him.

It is easily to be believed that the Margravine should have written to the King at Anspach, "He is in the best humour possible," for such feminine worship was much to Voltaire's taste. Although the Princes Augustus William of Prussia and Ferdinand of Brunswick had remained at Baireuth, yet Voltaire was the king of all the brilliant festivities. Wilhelmine had naturally done her utmost to make the visit of her guests as pleasant and enjoyable as possible. She may too have been anxious to show her family that, although she had given up all thoughts of greatness and splendour, it was yet possible for her in so remote a part of Germany to enjoy to the full the pleasures of life.

The Margravine's guests remained a fortnight at her Court; it was the first and only time that Voltaire ever was at Baireuth. Yet these days, spent in friendly and intellectual intercourse with Wilhelmine, shed a purifying light over the rest of his life. The impressions Baireuth made on Voltaire can be compared to those which a hidden and beautiful valley makes on him who has been continually tempest tossed on life's stormy seas. "Baireuth is a delicious retreat," Voltaire writes to Maupertuis on the 16th October, 1743, "where one can enjoy all the advantages of a court, without being inconvenienced by its grandeur."

It was a necessity with Voltaire to have the devotion of a woman. First of all it was actresses who fulfilled this duty, and later on the Marquise du Châtelet. "Uranie" as he called her in the letter which he addresses to her at the com-

mencement of his "Éléments de la Philosophie de Newton." Her ruling passions were Voltaire and Algebra. On his side there was less enthusiasm, at first Voltaire probably cared for the Marquise more out of curiosity—a mathematical mistress was something new and interesting—than from habit. "La sublime Émilie" was of a very jealous nature. Although outwardly no longer resembling an angel, she drove all other feminine influence out of her paradise with a flaming sword. Only the good-natured Madame de Graffigny, the authoress of the "Lettres Péruviennes" and other less important works was tolerated at Cirey. She was however no longer a dangerous rival, being fifty-six. This is the reason of the somewhat singular fact, that during the Cirey period Voltaire's correspondence with women was far more rare than before and after that time. The death of the Marquise at Lunéville, 10th September, 1749, was a great turning point in Voltaire's life. What attraction was there now to keep him in his own country, and prevent his accepting the tempting proposals of his Royal friend, which had for thirteen years been so often repeated and of late still more urgently? Was it perhaps the persecutions of the Jesuits, or the dislike of Louis XV, or the attacks of envious and spiteful authors? Voltaire saw how, in his own fatherland, a great country was sinking into ruin, through the mismanagement of a bad government, whilst in Prussia he saw a state rising up to power and importance through the wise rule of its Sovereign! Voltaire longed for a peaceful and quiet asylum. Sans Souci offered him rest, honour, liberty—a new life. With what pride must he have heard the loud whispers of admiration on the occasion of his first public appearance at a great *fête* at Berlin, on the 25th September, 1750. This brilliant entertainment, which took place in the Lust Garten (pleasure garden), of Berlin, illuminated by 30,000 coloured lamps, was given in honour of the Margravine of Baireuth. Voltaire and Wilhelmine had not met for

seven years, nor had they corresponded together except through third persons such as M. de Superville. During the Margravine's visit of three months at Berlin and Potsdam (from August 8th till November 26th), their acquaintance became more intimate, their relations closer, and their correspondence a regular one.

Wilhelmine was no longer a happy wife since she had made the painful discovery that her husband's affections had been stolen from her by one of her own ladies, and this the one she had loved and favoured the most. Even Descartes' "Idées innées" could not help her to overcome this first bitter sorrow. She had to battle it out alone! Who knows if she would not gladly have sacrificed all her learning in exchange for one sign of affection from her husband! Hers was not a demonstrative nor exacting nature, but it was one which needed love and affection. After many a bitter struggle she resigned herself to her fate.

Many changes had taken place in Wilhelmine's character during the last seven years. Sorrow and trouble had made her richer in experience; intellectual intercourse became a greater want, and intimate friends found her far more communicative. The Margravine conversed openly with Voltaire on all details connected with her family life. The elasticity of youth was past and gone, Wilhelmine required society and companionship, and as she could not find these at Baireuth, Voltaire undertook to procure her both. He first of all sent the actor Heurtand, to augment the French troupe at Baireuth. This actor had played with Lekain on Voltaire's own theatre at Paris, especially built for the representations of the author's own works. The court at Baireuth kept up an Italian Opera and French Comedy; Consuelo* and Lekain had both acted there. The Margrave

* A famous Italian singer.

Frederic had built an Opera House, the size and splendour of which still now create admiration, and once caused Frederic the Great to ask his brother-in-law where he had taken the money from wherewith to build it. It would have been more appropriate to have asked where the audience was to come from, to fill such a large house. Not only actors were sent to that lovely residence in the valley of the Main, but also other personages of interest.

"The Margravine wishes to attract Madame de Graffigny "to her court," Voltaire writes to his niece, Madame Denis, on 22nd August, 1750, "and I have besides suggested the "Marquis d'Adhémar to her. There is no room for him "here in the army, he ought at least to speak German well, "and this would be the least of the difficulties. To my "mind he could do nothing better during this time of peace "than to attach himself to the Court of Baireuth. Most of "the German courts resemble in fact that of the old Palatine, "at any rate during the time of the tournaments. They are "old castles where one endeavours to spend a pleasant and "enjoyable life. Beautiful ladies are to be seen, and elegant "cavaliers. Jugglers are sent for, and there is an Italian "Opera and a French Theatre at Baireuth, also a fine "Library, of which the Princess makes good use. I think it "will be a bargain for which both sides can be grateful to "me. With respect to Madame 'La Péruvienne,' she will "be more difficult to transplant. She has become at home in "Paris, is well thought of there, and has friends whom at "her age one dislikes giving up." It may be that Voltaire did not wish to see Madame de Graffigny hold an appointment about the Margravine. The "Peruvian" friend had been witness of many scenes at Cirey, between the poet and his beloved "Uranie," which he probably did not wish spoken about, and it seems that Madame de Graffigny was very fond of talking. The words quoted from Voltaire's letter are like a slight hint sent to Paris, and Madame

Denis' answer may have been somewhat to the same effect, for the letter written by Voltaire to the Margravine (bearing no date of any kind) would lead one to infer that he had arranged matters as he wished. This letter must have been written in September, 1750, as the subjects mentioned in it are also touched on in another to Madame Denis, where Voltaire mentions having acted the part of Cicero in the tragedy of "Rome Sauvée." This piece was given several times at Berlin after the King's return from Silesia in September, 1750. Another proof that this letter must have been written about that time, is contained in the fact of the poet's writing to his niece, Madame de Fontaine, on the 23rd September, 1750, speaking of his attacks of illness mentioned in the following letter.

MADAME,

I pray your Royal Highness to give up Madame de Graffigny; she is old and ailing. But you are ill and old, your Royal Highness will reply. Yes, Madame; but my feelings are still young, and the King, your brother, makes me grow younger. In a word, Madame de Graffigny does not wish to leave Paris, and I do not wish to leave Frederic the Great. In this world each one of us is governed by his own tastes. I will unearth some pleasant woman, neither young nor old, not a mischief-maker, clever, virtuous, and of good birth, and you shall have her for a new year's gift, as well as a certain little maniac called Heurtand, who has been retained by M. de Montperni. He makes you roar with laughter in comedy, and shed tears in tragedy. No Rome is saved to-day, you must have the King quite to yourself. Cicero is meanwhile tormented by infernal pains, and is therefore prevented from paying his court and appearing in shoes to-day.

I lay myself at your Royal Highness's feet.

VOLTAIRE.

The Margravine had returned on the 26th November, 1750, to her home. Voltaire had at last been induced to remain at Berlin, near the King; that is to say, he had always intended doing so when he came to Berlin, but the question had arisen as to what he was to receive for doing so. In order to make his salary as high a one as possible, he threatened to return to France, and then to make his "pilgrimage to Italy, to see St. Peter's at Rome, the Pope, "and the Venus di Medici." Voltaire did not go to France, neither did he ever see Italy. The King gave him his order "Pour le Mérite," the Lord Chamberlain's Key of Office, and a pension of 4,000 Thalers;* and another to Madame Denis of 4,000 "Livres"; besides this he had apartments, free table, and horses and carriages both at Berlin and at Potsdam. What could he want more?

The poet and the Margravine had given each other a promise on taking leave to keep up a regular correspondence. Voltaire was the first to begin it. He was most anxious to see the Marquis d'Adhémar appointed to the Court of Baireuth. We will gladly believe that it was as much in the Margravine's interest as in that of his friend. Who, after all, was the Marquis d'Adhémar? An acquaintance Voltaire had made at the Court of King Stanislas of Poland, at Lunéville, at the time of a curious intrigue planned by the Jesuit Menon, confessor to the old weak-minded Polish King. This priest, jealous of the influence exercised over the King by the Marquise de Boufflers (his favourite), wished to replace her by the Marquise du Châtelet. Voltaire and his "Uranie" came to Lunéville, but instead of taking part against Madame de Boufflers they became her fast friends in order to make war on the Jesuit priest.

It is to be supposed that Voltaire's acquaintance with

* £600.

Adhémar dates from the year 1749. We imagine the friendship to have arisen in this way: The Marquis, who belonged to one of the oldest families of the French nobility, being a young man of a poetical turn of mind, had been eager to show the celebrated author his admiration and respect. Voltaire, who was very susceptible to such attentions, had encouraged Adhémar to visit him at Paris. The Marquis spent the winter of 1749-50 in the French capital, and was much at Voltaire's house, where he took part in the theatrical representations; amongst others he acted Cæsar in "Rome sauvée." Adhémar seems to have been a great favourite not only with the poet, but also with his niece. A picture of Madame Denis hangs in one of the drawing-rooms at Sans Souci. She is there represented as young and pretty, with a very winning expression. Madame Denis courted admiration, and it may be for this reason that Voltaire was at such great pains to get the Marquis to Baireuth and away from Paris and his niece. The little we know of him, and of his relations to Voltaire and the Margravine, would lead us to infer that his was one of those sensitive amiable natures, that easily attached themselves to people, too much a man of society ever to figure prominently in the more important events of public life. He was the author of a work called the "Éloge historique de la Margrave de Baireuth."

At the end of the next letter, which was sent from the "Abbey of Sans Souci" to Baireuth, mention is made of Arnaud, who was the cause of all those misunderstandings which three years later brought about a complete rupture between Voltaire and Frederic the Great. "Place two "women, two authors, and two bigots at the end of the "world, there will still be one of them who will play tricks "to the others," Voltaire writes in one of his letters, and we apply this sentence to himself. Arnaud, author of the comedy "Le Mauvais Riche," came to Berlin on the recommendation of the Marquis d'Argens. "He gave himself out

"to be of high rank," Voltaire writes, "having lost his titles "of nobility, his poems, and the portraits of his mistresses on "the road, all of which he had enclosed in his nightcap." When Voltaire appeared at Berlin, Arnaud had already been established there for eight months in the capacity of literary correspondent, or, as Voltaire called him, "the King's "poem boy." The King had some time previously, whilst endeavouring to disgust Voltaire with his residence in France, and forcing him to come and settle at Berlin, sent a satire of the poet's on his old enemy "l'Ancien Évêque Mirepoix" or "l'Âne Mirepoix," as he called him, to the said Bishop through Count Rothenburg. But this had no effect; Voltaire would not leave France. The King now thought of a fresh way of gaining his wish, viz., to praise another author's poems, and this plan succeeded admirably. Voltaire appeared shortly at Berlin. In some very civil lines addressed to Arnaud by the King, Frederic had compared him to the rising, and Voltaire to the setting sun. Voltaire was furiously jealous of Arnaud on account of these flattering terms, and Arnaud was in turn much offended with Voltaire on account of the distinctions shown him by the King. Arnaud was too vain a creature, and possessed of too little genius to understand the appreciation of a greater one than his, even though to it he owed much gratitude. Voltaire pretended that Arnaud was in league with his enemies at Paris, and finally placed the alternative before the King, "Your Majesty—he or I?" Frederic reflected, that although he had no cause of complaint against Arnaud, yet Voltaire was of greater and more practical importance to him, therefore Arnaud must be sacrificed.

Arnaud was the beginning of the end. Voltaire seems to have felt something of this kind himself, when he wrote to his niece, "My triumph grieves me." Yet his cold calculating nature prevented his standing still and considering the possible results of his conduct; he felt himself so secure in the King's favour.

POTSDAM,
9th December, 1750.

MADAME,

Great devotion leads one very far, and I should have had the honour of following the worthy sister of a hero to Baireuth, had not the advantages of living near the hero still kept me at his feet. Your Royal Highness knows that I was to start on the 15th December for France, but how is it possible to have any other Fatherland but that of Frederic the Great? The only grief one has, is in no longer seeing your Royal Highness there. One is consoled by the news received of your health. It is said that it is re-established, that you bore the fatigues of the journey well. If your Royal Highness could have a body as perfect as your soul, and health equal to your beauty, what more could you wish for on earth? Perhaps, Madame will feel the desire of making some more people happy, and will draw around her some fresh, pleasant companions, worthy of seeing and of listening to her?

As I am unable to return to Paris as early as I intended, I have entrusted the duty of finding a Lady of rank, a widow, who is clever, literary, and fond of conversation, to my niece. Perhaps the desire of carrying out your wishes, will enable her to find that which your Royal Highness desires. Anyhow, I can assure you, that she will do her utmost, and that your Royal Highness can confidently accept what she will present to you. I still think that the Marquis d'Adhémar, who is known at your Court, would be a very proper person. I can answer for his good sense, for his cleverness, and for his worth. I do not think the Margrave could make a better choice, but on this point I shall await your orders. I feel more sure of the great acquisition which he would be to your Court, than I do of the Marquis d'Adhémar's present arrangements, but having had the honour of approaching your Royal Highness, who could doubt his wish of establishing

himself in her service. Deprived as I am of the pleasure of passing my life at your feet, and at those of the Margrave, I should be happy if my friend should be able to do so.

You are no doubt aware, Madame, that the King ordered d'Arnaud to leave Berlin at twenty-four hours' notice. He is now at Dresden, where he brags of his successes at the Court of Berlin.

I am, with the most profound respect, your Royal Highness's most humble and obedient servant

VOLTAIRE.

The following day, December 10th, the Margravine fulfilled her promise by writing a letter to Voltaire which crossed his from Potsdam. In person she was at the Castle of Baireuth, but in mind she dwelt in the "Abbey" or "Monastery," for by this name Frederic the Great's intimate circle called the Palace of Sans Souci. It was situated amidst terraces and vineyards at Potsdam. At the end of the left wing of the Palace an apartment had been arranged for the King's favourite. It was full of costly furniture, rare china, had a dressing-table such as Madame de Pompadour could scarcely have possessed. In this room, at a gilt writing table, covered with blue velvet, Voltaire worked, whenever Frederic sent for him to Sans Souci. He came there but rarely and lived generally in the Castle at Potsdam, which is only a quarter of an hour's walk from Sans Souci. His rooms in the castle were directly under those of the King, and looked out upon the "Lust Garten," the famous drill ground of the Prussian army. As we mentioned before, Sans Souci bore the name of the "Abbey" or "Monastery." The King was called the "Prior" or "Abbot" of this half military and half literary monastery, those around him were the "Brother Monks," and for this reason also Voltaire hereafter signs himself in his letters as "Brother Voltaire." Those members of the "Brotherhood"

not actually at Sans Souci were called "deacons." Their community was called "The Church," and everything condemned by the Church of Rome, they considered as "Holy." This profanation of clerical institutions, which the reader will often meet with in the following pages, was the outcome of the prevailing opinions and tone of the times. It was the natural reaction after the exclusive dominion and tyrannical oppressions which the Church's authority had exercised over all minds up to this time. In no other place in Europe, during the years preceding the Seven Years' War, was this revolutionary process against old institutions and the substitution of new ones so marked and characteristic as at Sans Souci.

10*th December*, 1750.

I promised you, Sir, to write to you, and I keep my word. I trust our correspondence will not be as meagre as are our two persons, and that you will often give me cause to reply to you. I will not speak to you of my regrets; it would only be renewing them. I am constantly transported to your Abbey, and you will understand that he who is its abbot occupies me always. I have executed your commissions with the Margrave. He desires me to assure you of his friendship, and begs you will conclude matters regarding the Marquis d'Adhémar. He will be charmed to take him in his service, as Chamberlain, and will make him conditions with which he can be satisfied. Although your recommendation suffices to the Margrave, it will be necessary for the satisfaction of the Marquis to have one either from Mons. de Puisieulx or from Mons. d'Argenson, which he could produce at Court. I should be much obliged to you if you would persuade him to come here soon, where we have great need of help to fill up the gaps in the conversation, which seem to be with us very like Chinese music, in which there are long pauses ending up in discordant tones. I am

afraid that my letter suffers from it; so much the better for you, Sir. Some moments of weariness are necessary in life, so as to set off to advantage those which give pleasure. After reading this letter, the little suppers will seem far more agreeable to you. Think of me sometimes, I beg of you, during them, and be convinced of my perfect esteem.

WILHELMINE.

In the next letter from the Margravine (the third which follows here) there is a note made at the words, "I have "received your consoling epistle." This note is by the author of Voltaire's published correspondence, and is as follows: "Letter unknown." We give the letter here, which is one of the most graceful of all those he wrote to Wilhelmine.

December, 1750.

MADAME,

Your Royal Highness is perfectly right; one ought to have a quiet peaceable life.

Princes and monks have only their lives in this world. It is not Regiments which constitute happiness, but to pass the twenty-four hours of the day in quietness, and this is far more difficult than one would suppose. The Great Turk is bored at Constantinople, and yet it is a beautiful town. The situation of Baireuth is not a very cheerful one, but cleverness and affability embellish all things. Well then, Madame, as it is necessary to use "big words," what would you do with your intelligence, and your charms, if your Royal Highness had not half a dozen people of worth to be influenced by them? It is a very good idea to add some more voices to your orchestra. I have written twice again letters to the Marquis d'Adhémar, but have still no answer—he must be under the charm of some Armida. I have written a furious letter to my niece, she must use her authority, and disenchant Adhémar, so as to send him more

enchanted to your feet. But, Madame, it would require two Adhémars, and two Graffignys, as recruits to pleasure.

I swear by the devotion I bear to your Royal Highness that had I been able to go to Paris, I should have brought you some recruits, not beardless boys, not fools, composers of high-flown verses, but people worthy of paying you their court. Ah! Madame, romances sometimes pass through my mind. I say to myself: supposing that during the months of November, December, and January, when the King had enough company, I could go and pay my respects to the divine sister! If whilst I came there from the East, my niece should come there from the West? And then the operas, the new dramas, would not that all be far more worth while than going to Italy? Madame, I would prefer you to St. Peter at Rome, to the subterranean city—to the Pope himself. Is that possible? I know nothing about it. I live from one day to another, working day and night at the century of Louis XIV. I am endeavouring to present a great picture of the revolution of the human mind, during that time when people began to think, from the Alps to the Carpathians. It may help to amuse some of your Royal Highness's leisure moments. But I must get rid of my romance about Baireuth, for to dream that you possess a treasure, and to wake up and find oneself empty-handed, is too sad.

I am writing all this accompanied by the sound of drums, of trumpets, and of incessant reports of firearms, which deafen my pacific ears; it is good for Frederic the Great. He requires his armies of a morning, and Apollo in the afternoon. He possesses everything: he forms battalions and composes rhymes. As to the rest, each brother is peaceably established in his cell; M. de Rothenbourg still continues ill, Maupertuis also, Pölnitz is rather sad.

I am always pining and sickly—always working hard, and always longing to pay my respects to your Royal Highnesses.

Would it be permitted, if not wanting in respect, to beg that M. de Maupertuis may not be forgotten. My paper is at an end, and there is no room for the expression of my profound respect. What does it matter?

VOLTAIRE.

We shall often meet with the name of the Marquis de Montperni in the following correspondence. He was a Frenchman by birth, Lord Chamberlain to the Margravine, and Director of the Theatre and public works at Baireuth. He was much esteemed by the Margrave and Margravine, as well as by Frederic the Great, for his noble character. It was to his house that the Margravine was carried from her bed of sickness when the Castle of Baireuth was nearly burnt down, January 26, 1753. Montperni accompanied the Margravine on her last visit to Berlin. It was there apparently that Voltaire made his acquaintance.

It was a peculiarity of Voltaire's to speak in derision of his own ugly appearance. He used to compare himself in this respect with Angelo Cori, manager of the Berlin Opera. This Italian was the ugliest man in all Berlin, and therefore often spoken of there as "Angel Cori." Hofrath L. Schneider, in his excellent history of the Berlin Opera, gives a description of Cori, according to which Voltaire certainly had the satisfaction of knowing that there existed at least one person more frightful than himself.

In Voltaire's next letter he makes mention of this mutual ugliness. The Margravine was at this time occupied in turning Voltaire's "Sémiramis" into an opera. She composed the music and Cori wrote the Italian libretto, which was submitted to the poet for correction, although he personally disliked the whole undertaking. The opera was not to be detrimental to the orignal work, but it could not help detracting from its interest. The tragedy had not been well received by the Berlin public. "Zaïre," on the contrary,

which, strange to say, Voltaire did not think worth one single scene of "Rome Sauvée," had met with a greater success. This piece was given by Prince Henry of Prussia's little troupe, *i.e.*, Prince Augustus William and Prince Henry, Princess Amélie, who acted the chief part, and Voltaire, who took the part of "the good Lusignan." Perhaps, on this occasion, Voltaire wore the diamonds about which he had the lawsuit with the Jew, Hirsch. Lady Tyrconnel, wife of the French envoy at Berlin, was "Andromache," but the one actor who seemed most at home in his part was the burly Irish Lord Tyrconnel. He had nothing else to do but to sit at the dinner table. The chief event of the winter festivities was the artistic representation of the opera "Phæton." Graun had composed the music and directed it in person, sitting at the piano in a red coat, with a white wig. This opera enchanted the court and the public, not so much on account of the music and the singers, as for the marvellous manner it had been put on the stage, a thing never before seen at Berlin. Above all, the Temple of the Sun God, composed of columns of glass, illuminated by numberless lamps, produced a dazzling effect.

At Berlin,
19*th December*, 1750.

Madame,

Your Royal Highness's commands have crossed with the expression of my homage, and whilst I was placing myself at her feet she was deigning to write to me. I was anxious for the Marquis d'Adhémar and Spada's sake, and I would venture to say also for that of your Royal Highnesses that he should be at your Court. Permit me, Madame, to have the honour of explaining to you that it is difficult to suggest to him to carry about letters of introduction in his pocket. He is the son of the Great Chamberlain of King Stanislas, and it only depended on himself

to become Chamberlain at that Court with every advantage his birth and abilities could procure him. His love of war prevented his taking this post. He is one of the King of France's best officers. He was a captain in the cavalry; he had been promised a regiment, which promise was never kept. He was to have been sent as the King's minister to Brussels; again he was passed over.

This is the situation. I imagined that his disappointment at being useless, and the knowledge he has of your Royal Highness, might induce him to associate himself with your Court. I must obtain your Royal Highness's permission not to speak with Mons. d'Adhémar till after you have been fully informed of his worth. It will be easy for the King's minister to obtain this at Paris.

You can also, Madame, desire Mons. d'Ammon, the King's Chamberlain, who is going to France about a Treaty of Commerce, to report to you on Mons. d'Adhémar, and to speak to the ministers about it, without letting it be suspected that he wishes to leave France.

Graciously remember, Madame, that I have made no promises respecting the Marquis d'Adhémar, that I told your Royal Highness that I would do my utmost to get hold of him; I still persist in this wish, because I know Mons. d'Adhémar is capable of attachment, and that he is not one of those who are likely to leave a charming Court to go and settle at Monaco. I shall await your Royal Highness's orders on this subject. I shall still remain three months in this monastery, where you are regretted every day. I am still a monk at Berlin, as I was at Potsdam, being only acquainted with my cell and with the reverend Father Abbot, near to whom I wish to live and die, and who alone consoles me for not passing my days with your Royal Highness. Your monastery and his are the only ones where a soul like mine can find salvation. I have heard the service of "Saint Semiramis" put into verse, or something like it, by

Brother Cori, Chaplain to the Opera. Sparks of that divine fire which animate the august Wilhelmine are to be found in Brother Cori's poems. We had a representation of "Phæton" yesterday, and in order to give a truer idea of the conflagration caused by this audacious personage, the scenery caught fire. The King was slightly indisposed and did not see the opera. Prince Henry's little troupe are going to give "Zaïre," but whilst amusement is prevailing here, great mortality rages among the animals; the horses have got the plague in England; mankind has it in Poland and on the frontiers of Wallachia.

Live happy, Madame, and take care of your precious health, and deign still to bestow your favours and that of the Margrave on me. I have attended to your commands.

I renew to your Royal Highnesses the expression of my profound respect.

Brother Voltaire.

CHAPTER III.

The Margravine, it would appear, was in singularly good spirits and humour at this time. The King, writing to his sister on the 31st December, 1750, says, "The only thing which comforts me for your absence is the knowledge of your being so well in health and in such good temper; at least so it appears from your letter."

Her letters are full of jokes, and she sometimes seems to go somewhat too far in her love of making witty remarks. One can fancy the dismay of the old court Chaplain Noltenius, before whom Wilhelmine had made her declaration of faith as a child, could he have heard his former pupil cite St. Paul as the author of the Epistle to the "elect Lady" instead of St. John! Such mistakes are pardonable, but to place the epistle of one of the Apostles in the same category as that of a French author of comedies, and to speak of the miracles of the Holy Spirit in a profane manner in connection with the birth of the Elector Frederic Augustus of Saxony, was giving her wit too much license.

The House of Hohenzollern belonged to that branch of Protestantism which owned the cold fanatic Calvin as its head. His dogmas were quite as rigid as those of the Roman Catholic Church, though they lacked the attractive forms of the latter. The devil played a great part in the religious belief, "no devil, no God" was its creed. Everyone who did not believe in the former was looked on as a heretic. According to this opinion the Margravine certainly was one. She was averse to all restraint and rule in matters of faith, though she on the other hand fully accepted our Saviour's teaching of love and charity. The philosophy of her master

Descartes sprang from his belief in God and led back to Him again. "I pity your blindness only to believe in one God and to deny Christ," Wilhelmine writes to Voltaire. Could a true Christian have given a more decided proof of faith than this? As to Voltaire, the excesses which had been perpetrated for ages under the cloak of Christianity had raised doubts in his mind, and had led him at last to deny the existence of a Saviour. It was at this point that Wilhelmine and Voltaire's paths separated.

In the Margravine and her brother Christian faith was innate, but from their earliest youth they had rebelled against being forced to adhere to certain formulas laid down for them. Their independent spirit and desire for liberty of thought led them to look for a life-giving power in Christianity, and they found only a doctrine of dead letters and set forms. Is it therefore to be wondered at that these young minds should have refused to believe in what was placed before them in so cold and unmeaning a form, though beneath it lay so much hidden treasure? Is it strange that they should have become callous, nay, have begun to doubt, even to deny? In Frederic's case there was no recovery from this state of unbelief, and he sought compensation for it in restless activity. With Wilhelmine, however, sorrow, trouble, and the experiences of life transformed the dry dogmas into a real and lively faith which satisfied her longings and aspirations. In her belief in Christ she found light, love, peace; hence her deeply rooted hatred for all unchristian demeanour, insolent bigotry, fanatical persecutions, and narrow-minded superstition; in one word, for the dark cloud of ignorance which lay over mankind.

The reader must not be misled by a satirical remark here and there: it but represents a peculiarity which arose, in great measure, from the prevailing tone adopted by society. Let us bear in mind that one striking remark: "I pity your blindness only to believe in one God and to deny Christ."

25th December, 1750.

Sister Guillemette to Brother Voltaire, greeting: for I number myself among the happy inmates of your Abbey, although I am no longer there, and I am counting much, if God gives me a good and long life, to take my place there again one day. I have received your consoling epistle. I swear my biggest oath, that it edified me infinitely more than that of St. Paul* to the elect Lady, which epistle caused me to feel a certain drowsiness worthy of opium, preventing me seeing its beauties. Yours had the contrary effect, it roused me from my lethargy, and has restored action to my vital spirits.

Although you have postponed your journey to Paris, I hope you will keep your word and that you will come and see me. Apollo used to familiarize himself with mortals, and did not scorn to become a pastor in order to instruct them. Do the same, Sir, you cannot follow a better example.

What do you say to the arrival of the Messiah at Dresden? Will you be able after that to question miracles? If I had been the Prince Royal of Saxony I would have given the whole honour to the Holy Spirit; but he thinks like Charles VI.

When the Empress gave birth to the Archduke, people said that St. Nepomuck had the credit of it; "God forbid," the Emperor said, "I should then be a cuckold."

But let us there leave the Holy Spirit and the Messiah. Although he is born to-day, I assure you I never should have thought of him, without the marvellous event in Saxony. I prefer to think of the "beaux esprits" of Potsdam, of its Abbot and its monks. In your turn, think sometimes of those who are absent. Rely always on me, as on a true friend.

WILHELMINE.

* The Margravine evidently means 3rd Epistle of St. John.

The Margravine sends the foregoing letter in answer to one Voltaire wrote her in December, 1750. On the 28th December she seems not yet to have received the one written on 19th December. To this latter she sends the following answer.

6th January, 1752.

I take advantage of a moment remaining to me, to acquaint you, Sir, that the Duke of Wurtemberg intends taking the Marquis d'Adhémar into his service. He became acquainted with him at Paris, and I learned from a gentleman in the Duke's suite, that the Marquis d'Adhémar proposed himself coming here. I beg you to be beforehand, and to engage him to come soon to this Court. I wish you perfect health during this year. It is the only thing you lack to make you happy. We are acting here as you are doing at Berlin. Good bye. I must leave you to rehearse my part. Be persuaded of my perfect esteem.

WILHELMINE.

BERLIN,
6th January, 1751.

MADAME,

Brother Voltaire has only changed his cell. He lives at Berlin, as at Potsdam, in great retirement, thinking much of your Royal Highness. He promises to come in person to your royal monastery, to ask your blessing, as soon as he returns from that great town of Paris, to which he must at last repair to put his temporal affairs in order, which he has too long neglected for the spiritual ones of the Rev. Father Abbot. I am much surprised that your reverence should not have received two letters from me instead of one. I certainly had the honour of writing twice to you from the Priory of Potsdam. It seems that heaven does not favour the intercourse of such lax monks as we are. Your reverence makes some most salutary reflections on the

last miracle. You know how necessary miracles sometimes are. We formerly required a Virgin in France, and oftentimes the reverse was required elsewhere. *O signore, signore figliuoli in ogni modo!* Love was the Holy Spirit of ancient days. It was he who concerned himself in those matters. In our present times it is the monks and the saints. Our mythology is pitiable; nothing falls so flat as what is called catholicism.

Let us now turn to the commands your Royal Highness has given me concerning the Marquis d'Adhémar. I have written to him, and shall do myself the honour of reporting his answer. I feel sure that he will be most sensible of the happiness of being admitted a member of your court. He has a soul worthy of yours, and I venture to say that he is just the person made to suit the Margrave and yourself. M. de Montperni will find in him a most agreeable companion. He possesses, besides, much taste, composes pretty verses, and he is above all things the most upright man in this world, as he is the most courageous. It is sad to be obliged to speak to a man with such a character of such rubbish as salary and money, and it is to sully the paper and fatigue your Royal Highness with these nothings, which Sister Guillemette despises so thoroughly. But these matters being an absolute necessity in this life, and as Kings as well as charcoalburners are unable to do anything without money, I have mentioned the subject in my letter to the Marquis d'Adhémar. I do not think your Royal Highness will disavow me, and I therefore wrote that 1500 crowns * would be about what was necessary. I think that M. de Montperni's salary does not amount to more, and we must not give any cause for jealousy, even between persons who cannot be jealous. I have considered your purse, and done violence to your generosity by proposing 1500 crowns. It will be only

* Quinze cents écus.

your Royal Highness and the Margrave who can scold me for having offered little, for my friend d'Adhémar will not. In a word, he cannot live at a more generous Court, and this Court cannot make a more worthy acquisition. I wish he could start with my niece and me, but ah! adorable Abbesse, if we were all three in your convent, we would wish never to leave it. All the other Brothers kiss the hem of your sacred robe.

I do not know if M. de Montperni has received news of a little mad comic actor whom I had procured as a recruit for your troupe. I do not quite know how to call myself to M. de Montperni's remembrance; one cannot take such liberties in writing to your Royal Highness. I lay myself at your Royal Highness' feet, and at those of His Royal Highness. We acted "Zaïre" yesterday. Prince Henry surpassed himself; the Prince Royal spoke very distinctly. Prince Ferdinand softened his voice, Princess Amélie displayed much tenderness, and the Queen-Mother was enchanted. But, Baireuth, Baireuth, when shall I have the happiness of witnessing your fêtes, and above all of admiring, of revering, and of daring to adore from nearer that august Princess to whom I present my profound respects from so far?

VOLTAIRE.

23*rd January*, 1751.

I must have explained myself very badly in my last letter, since you have not understood the sense of it. I was perhaps at that moment inspired by the Holy Spirit. As you are not an Apostle, you found most obscure that which I thought perfectly clear. I come to the explanation of it. The Duke of Wurtemberg announced to me that he had the intention of taking the Marquis d'Adhémar into his service. I feared he would inform you of it, and asked you to arrange in such a way that the Marquis should refuse the offer made to him in the Duke's name. The Margrave will not disavow

you respecting the fifteen hundred crowns which you have offered him as salary. I beg you to hurry on this business, and to engage M. d'Adhémar to come here soon. It is intended to give him an office above that of Chamberlain, and you can count on the Margrave showing him every imaginable attention.

I think your residence in Germany inspired all hearts with a rage for reciting poetry. The Court of Wurtemberg returns here on purpose to act with us. The sensible Vriot has, according to my mind, chosen the most detestable play there is as regards versification: it is "Orestes and Pylades," by La Motte. I admire the different modes of thought which there are in the world. You exclude women from your tragedies at Potsdam, and we would, if we had a Voltaire, diminish the number of men in those we act here. Cannot you possibly arrange a piece for us, and give the two principal parts to women? The Duke and my daughter act very prettily, but that is all. Poor Montperni is still too languid to take any chief part, and the others only mutilate your pieces. I did not dare propose "Sémiramis," the Duchess-mother having acted that piece at Stuttgard.

I have seen, during these last days, a very singular personage. It is one of the Pope's referendaries, a prelate, Canon of S. Marie, and in spite of all that, a sensible man, exasperated against the monks, free from prejudices, and speaking only of tolerance.

Your little actor has arrived. As I have been much indisposed all this time, I have not yet seen him, but they have spoken very well of him to me.

Come soon and visit us in our convent; it is all that we wish. The Margrave sends you many messages. Greet all the Brothers who still remember me, and be persuaded that the Abbess of Baireuth desires nothing so much as to be able to convince Brother Voltaire of her perfect esteem.

WILHELMINE.

A great genius makes itself everywhere apparent, and Voltaire would have become as great a banker as he was an author. He would have made a most brilliant speculation, had his transaction with the Saxon bank bills succeeded. What would have been considered a very clever operation on the Bourse in these days was, at that time of financial ignorance in Germany, looked on as a crime in Voltaire, and an abuse of his position. One of the conditions of the Peace of Dresden had been, that all Prussian subjects who had money invested in the Saxon Bank should receive not only the full interest due to them, but have the whole capital paid back to them within a given period. At the same time the bank bills were not to be used for speculation. It was against this decision that Voltaire sinned. He sent the Jew Abraham Hirsch to Dresden and Leipzig with Bills of Exchange, in order to buy bank bills standing at 65.* Hirsch had given him diamonds as a security for the Bills of Exchange. Whilst Hirsch was on his way to Dresden, another Jewish business-man, named Ephraim, offered to do the same business for Voltaire without receiving any commission for it. Voltaire was merely to recommend him at the Court of Berlin. This would cost the poet no money, above all a few words, so much the better. In order to cancel the transaction with Abraham Hirsch, Voltaire managed to have the Bills of Exchange he had given him dishonoured from Paris two days before they fell due. Abraham Hirsch returned from Saxony without the bank bills, and much put out at the Bills of Exchange having been dishonoured, as he pretended this measure had done his own business harm, he threatened Voltaire with legal proceedings. These would have been most unpleasant for the poet, on account of the stipulations contained in the Treaty of Dresden. He therefore promised

* £4,500.

Hirsch compensation for his travelling expenses, trouble, and loss of time, in offering to buy the diamonds from him. These stones were set in buckles of various sizes and in rings, which Voltaire had worn at the representation of one of his tragedies at Potsdam. No actor had probably ever acted in more splendid attire than did Voltaire adorned with these diamonds, and who knows if he was not prouder of them than of his verses! It seems that later on the poet regretted his purchase, preferring money to precious stones, and brought an action against Hirsch. He accused the Jew of having cheated him, who in return insisted that Mons. de Voltaire had altered the document authorizing the transaction, and had changed some of the stones. Enough, the questions of dispute were never thoroughly examined from a legal point of view. The King had desired the Chancellor Cocceji to treat the whole matter strictly according to law, without any consideration being shown to either side. Yet it would appear from the legal documents that the Judges had passed over much, and entirely in Voltaire's favour. At length a compromise was effected between the contending parties, through which Voltaire gained no great advantage.

Baron Pölnitz gives the following account of a visit which Voltaire paid to the Chancellor whilst the lawsuit was proceeding. "Voltaire said he had come in order to submit "some remarks to him he had made on the Code of Justice, "just published by his Excellency, and which contained some "great absurdities, particularly with respect to Bills of Ex- "change. The Chancellor thanked him for his remarks, and "promised to profit by them in the future. He, however, "expressed the wish that things might remain as they were "till judgment had been pronounced on the lawsuit."

This whole quarrel has been treated here at some length, as the reader would in all probability not be acquainted with the facts of the case, and also because mention is often made of it both by Voltaire and the Margravine in their letters.

It was in great measure the cause of the first serious estrangement between the poet and his Royal friend, and was one of the chief accusations which Frederic brought against Voltaire. Besides this, a visit paid by him to the Russian Envoy, Mons. de Grass, was brought up against him, as it was supposed to have caused serious political complications.

The Austrian, French, and Russian alliance, which six years later gave occasion to Frederic to display the full glory of his military genius, was already impending in the year 1750. Mons. de Grass had been sent to Berlin by the Empress Elizabeth of Russia, in order to bring about a rupture between the Courts of Petersburg and Prussia. By what means was immaterial, as long as they succeeded. The Russian Envoy was at a loss how to fulfil his mission. A bright thought suddenly struck him. At a fête given at Charlottenburg, the Diplomatic Corps were to be invited to stay to supper. Mons. de Grass becoming aware of this, very cleverly left the royal apartments a quarter-of-an-hour before the invitation could reach him. He was not asked to supper! What an unheard of insult to his sovereign! He left Berlin, the diplomatic relations between the two powers were broken off, the war between Prussia and Russia was declared seven years later, and all on account of a supper.

30th January, 1751.

MADAME,

Your Royal Highness has more rivals than you are aware of, but I think that the Marquis d'Adhémar will give you the preference. I have again written strongly to him. My whole desire is to be able to be at your feet this spring. But who is the man who is master of his fate? Brother Voltaire is here undergoing punishment; he has a troublesome lawsuit with a Jew, and according to the law of the Old Testament, he will have to pay for having been robbed; but over and

above all, the result of it is a delightful quarrel, which, if subdivided into four or five smaller ones, would be a fitting subject for a comedy, as amusing as the manifesto of the Czarina, who calls Europe to witness that M. de Grass was not invited to supper. It would be an amusing piece for your Royal Highness's theatre at Baireuth. Prince Henry acted Sidney yesterday, as the finale to the Carnival. It seemed to me like putting on mourning on a day of rejoicing. It was a strange subject for a Prince of nineteen years to choose. I would as soon see a funeral as this piece. Prince Henry, however, recites so well, and is so graceful in all he does, that he entirely saved me from the disgust and the painfulness of the work.

Madame, when we act at Potsdam without women, I assure you that it is much against our will. The monks pray to God to send them women, but believe me, do not try to do without men at Baireuth. The stage is the representation of human life, and in this life it is necessary that men and women should be together, as otherwise it would only be half an existence.

Take care of your health, Madame, that is the most essential point. If worth were able to bestow health, then you would have the best any Princess in this world could enjoy, but unfortunately in your case the most solid worth is contained in the weakest of human frames. You are condemned to a strict régime whilst La Métrie has two fits of indigestion a day, and only feels the better for them. Your Royal Highness and the King are, I think, of all Princes blessed with the greatest intellects and with the worst digestions. But there must be compensation for everything. As to myself, poor wretch, I intend to spin out here another month, and then go to Paris to arrange my affairs.

I do not think that there is any other route to Paris than over Baireuth, and my heart, which alone guides me, tells

me I must take that road. I lay myself at your Royal Highness's feet, and present to you my profound respect as well as to the Margrave.

VOLTAIRE.

It is remarkable how in the course of years the opinions on historical personages of past centuries alter. The two next letters are very interesting in this respect. "Good King Henry IV" of France was Voltaire's hero. It was natural he should be so, considering the century in which Voltaire lived and the nation to which he belonged. Henry IV was also held up in opposition to Louis XV's indolence, intolerance, and weakness. The "Henriade" was an indirect satire on this latter King. The enthusiasm which still exists in France for the first Bourbon is really due to the "Henriade," and Henry IV could not have had a more skilful partisan than Voltaire, though no one would wish to dispute the great qualities of this Sovereign. The Margravine's clear and unprejudiced judgment did not however allow her to be blinded, and she was convinced in her own mind that Henry IV owed his glory alone to the genius of his ministers. She courageously asserted as her own individual opinion what now-a-days has become an acknowledged fact.

18*th February*, 1751.

If you desire to see me again very much, the feeling is reciprocal. Brother Voltaire will be welcome at whatever time it be, and we will try to make our abbey as pleasant to him as it is possible. Do not be surprised at my former language. It was ingenuous, and who says ingenuous says it was sincere. In short, I am reading Sully's Memoirs; I have read through all those I have on the History of France. These secret memoirs make one far better acquainted with facts than general histories, where the authors often attribute great deeds — sometimes political, sometimes military — to

those who were but little concerned in them. I have come to the conclusion that you have had some very great men and some very commonplace Kings. Henry IV might perhaps never have reigned, or would not have been able to maintain his position without a Sully; and Louis XIV without a Louvois, a Colbert and a Turenne would never have acquired the name of the Great. Such is the world: one sacrifices to greatness, but rarely to merit.

You tell me many extraordinary things. Apollo having a lawsuit with a Jew! Fie, Sir, that is abominable! I have searched through the whole mythology, and have not found a shadow of pleadings of such description in the Parnassus. However comical it may be, I do not wish to see it represented on the stage. Great men ought only to appear on it in their lustre. I wish to contemplate you as judge of the mind, talent and sciences, triumphing over Racine and Corneille, and the perpetual dictator of the republic of the "Belles Lettres." I hope your Israelite will have borne the punishment of his knavery, and that you will have a quiet mind. Send us soon the Marquis d'Adhémar; think of happiness, renounce repentance, keep well, think sometimes of me, and rely on my perfect esteem.

WILHELMINE.

1*st March*, 1751.

MADAME,

Brother Voltaire received your Royal Reverence's benediction the day before yesterday. The style of the "good old times" suits you equally well as that of the present day. You possess the delicacy of the one and the ingenuousness of the other. If the Duc de Sully could have known that his waste papers, economical, royal, and political, were one day to be studied by the Margravine of Baireuth, his vanity would have been greatly heightened.

I think your Royal Highness is the first person who has

placed the Duc de Sully above Henri Quatre. As to myself, weak minded man that I am, I confess that I prefer the weaknesses of that good King to all the austere virtues of his minister. I think even that as regards the powers of government, Henry the Great possessed them to a greater extent than did the Duc de Sully. We owe several manufactures, and above all the introduction of silk worms, to the enlightened persistence of that worthy King, who overcame the obstinate and blind resistance of his minister.

Besides the Duc de Sully had several lawsuits against Jews who supplied the army; for that reason I must be forgiven for having been able to win one against a scoundrel of the Old Testament, whom after all I treated with too much generosity after having had him condemned. This affair troubled me greatly, because, as your Royal Highness says, men of letters appear only to exist for the purpose of writing, and that they ought not to buy diamonds.

M. d'Adhémar makes me hope daily that he will be fortunate enough to come to your Royal Highness's Court. If I were in his place, I should have started for it long ago. I hope that the Chamberlain, M. d'Ammon, who lodges in my house in Paris, and who has supper every evening with the Marquis d'Adhémar, will not run counter to my negociation. As regards the lady I am anxious to find for your Royal Highness, there is but little hope of my finding one at present. The reason of this is, that of two things, either I shall die here of my chest, or I shall go to Italy before seeing Paris again. But be certain, Madame, that my heart will secretly prefer the stay at Baireuth to St. Peter's at Rome or St. Mark at Venice. The benedictions of the Pope and the buffooneries of Venice are certainly not worth the honour of approaching you, and the pleasure of listening to you. I lay myself at the Margrave's feet and assure your Royal Highnesses of the renewed expression of the profound respect and sincere attachment of the poor suffering Brother Voltaire.

Your kindness towards M. de Montperni, of which he is so deserving, seems to require me to offer my best wishes for his health. A good monk should always pray for all the Brothers.

VOLTAIRE.

In spite of all Voltaire's exertions and entreaties, the charming, amiable, and talented Marquis d'Adhémar had not yet appeared at Baireuth. Indeed, he did not arrive there for some time. Paris had too great attractions for him; to be far from it was like being banished out of the world. Baireuth and the Margravine could always be fallen back upon in case of need. It may be a false supposition, for there is nowhere positive proof of the fact, but the feeling existed that Mad. Denis was the "fair Armida" who kept Adhémar a prisoner at Paris. Voltaire clearly saw how matters stood, but explained them differently to the Margravine. How else are his anxiety and feverish eagerness for Adhémar's departure from Paris to be understood? It seems the Marquis had supper every evening with the Chamberlain d'Ammon who lived in the poet's house, and Mad. Denis did the honours! Patience! The Marquis will eventually come to Baireuth, when the little romance in Paris is at an end. Another guest arrived at the Margravine's Court (but not the long hoped-for one), in the person of the King's physician, the grave Cothenius. He seems not to have been very entertaining, but he had a great gift, that of curing sick people, and all were ill, the world and the century. How could it otherwise have been so interesting?

The King had given other evidence of his extraordinary good judgment in the choice of those with whom he surrounded himself, by attaching Cothenius to his service. This physician was born in the town of Havelberg, in Brandenburg; he was extremely clever, and

rendered the King good service during the seven years' war. Cothenius often repeated his visits to Baireuth, as the Margravine's own doctor, and Daniel de Superville had exchanged his medical profession for that of diplomacy, having gone as Envoy to the Hague. For some time past Wilhelmine's health had caused much anxiety, and the attacks of illness increased in gravity the oftener they recurred. Cothenius started for his first visit to Baireuth in May 1751, and was the bearer of a letter from Voltaire.

POTSDAM,
8th May, 1751.

MADAME,

Your Royal Highness expected M. d'Adhémar and Cothenius. Instead of being surrounded by pleasures of all descriptions, is she forced to have nothing but juleps and globules? Shall we always be in fear and trembling for a precious life? If the deep interest shown here by all in your health could be of any avail, your Royal Highness would soon completely recover.

Your Royal Highness knows the feeling I bear her; and she knows too, the dominion she exercises over people's hearts. I am equally devoted to brother and to sister. I should like to sing my matins at Potsdam, and my vespers at Baireuth.

If I was certain that this letter would reach you at a moment when you were less ailing, I would speak to you of the Marquis d'Adhémar, who has not yet been able to make up his mind to leave Paris. I would also speak to you of a gentleman from Lorraine, called Liébaud, an officer, a man of letters, sensible, educated, and on whom one can depend. I can, however, only speak of your health, and of our anxiety and grief. Why cannot I accompany M. Cothenius? Why can I not come and lay myself at your feet, and at those of His Royal Highness? The King is going to Cleves. I

remain scribbling in my cell. The bodily ills from which I suffer make me lead a sedentary life; but I forget my sufferings, Madame, only to think of those you endure, and I am indignant with nature that I am not the only one to suffer. Why must so strong a soul be lodged in so frail a body? We have ten thousand big boys here at Potsdam, who think of nothing, and who, as I write, are firing off ten thousand rounds of ammunition at the gates. They are all as well as possible, and the Margravine of Baireuth is suffering! And Providence, where is it? I shall not be its servant, if you have no health, and I will sing a Te Deum when Cothenius returns.

Brother Voltaire.

CHAPTER IV.

After this last letter an interval of ten months occurs in the correspondence. "I am too lazy to write letters," Wilhelmine's friend writes to his niece, Madame de Fontaine. "I have been very ill this winter, and thought I should have died, but I have only grown old."

The relations between Voltaire and the King had lately become less intimate, and there were signs of apparent displeasure on Frederic's part. "In the circle of the Queen Mother it is generally believed that I have fallen into disgrace with your Majesty," the poet writes to the King on January 30th, 1752. "Le chef de la Bande," Baron Pölnitz says with ill-disguised jealousy, "is still in disgrace, and yet better treated than Ovid was in the time of his favour at the Court of Augustus." Voltaire still retained his apartments in the Castles, his horses and carriages, but the King gave him so much liberty, that it made him quite unhappy. He saw him very seldom, and the effect this produced on the former favourite, who had been courted by Generals, Ministers and Field-marshals, is evident from the following letter of Pölnitz: "Voltaire is alone here, so greatly depressed "in mind and body as scarcely to be recognized. He spent two "hours with me yesterday, and our conversation was most "gloomy, his from grief, and mine from the feeling of "the superiority of his genius. After some silence, he told "me that he was on the point of starting for Italy. He "asked me if he should make a digression and pass by "Baireuth. A moment later he asked me to let him have "the house I now occupy with all its furniture, adding that "he felt he could not tear himself away from here, as he was

"too much devoted to the King ever to leave him. Then a "quarter of an hour later, he asked what orders I had for "Paris, as he hoped to arrive there on the 15th—16th May."

This morose and unsettled mood is apparent in Voltaire's next letter. The Margravine had, as she herself remarks, reproached him, or had him reproached, for his silence. The beginning of his letter refers to this. How could Voltaire otherwise break off suddenly from the subject in order to speak of "La Pucelle," if Wilhelmine had not made some such remark in a former letter? In one to Mad. Denis, of the 3rd January, 1751, the poet complains to her that his secretary had given up "Jeanne, that girl who ought to have "been kept under lock and key," to Prince Henry, after much earnest entreaty. Already on 22nd February, 1747, the king had written to Voltaire: "You sent your 'Pucelle' to "the Duchess of Wurtemberg; learn that she had it copied "during the night." It had happened during those enjoyable days at Baireuth. It is positive that a question was put to Voltaire by Wilhelmine with regard to "La Pucelle," a poem of which fragments were scattered at Berlin, Stuttgard, and Vienna.

Lord Tyrconnel, the French Envoy at Berlin, had died on 12th March, 1752, preceded by his friend La Métrie on 11th November, 1751. Lord Tyrconnel's house had been among the first in Berlin society. Lady Tyrconnel had introduced high play, dined at 5 or 6 o'clock, and went to parties at midnight, an unheard of novelty at Berlin. Voltaire had acted, dined, and joked with Lord Tyrconnel. He wished to erect a monument to his departed friend, and did so in his "Pucelle," upon which he was just at work. "Le Duc Tyrconnel," who so suddenly interrupts the interview between "Dorothée" and "La Trémouille," is the true representation of the "frais, fort et rigoureux Milord Tyrconnel"; at the end of the piece he becomes a Carthusian monk, which was a symbolic allusion to his having become "a silent man."

BERLIN,
28*th March*, 1751.

MADAME,

This sickly brother, this moping brother, this scribbling brother is more than ever at your Royal Highness' feet. If he wrote to her as often as he thinks of her, she would receive five or six letters a day.

I am waiting, Madame, for the happy moment when my health will permit of my undertaking the journey to Baireuth. It seems to me that I have given up going to France and to Italy, but I console myself with the hope of paying you my court.

Those fond of the fine arts were formerly obliged to go to Naples, to Florence, to Ferrara; now they go to Baireuth.

If your Royal Highness has the wish to have a new opera given at Baireuth, let me advise you not to choose "Orpheus," which the King, your brother, has just had played. I never saw a more foolish Pluto or a more tiresome Orpheus. There are always fine things in Graun's music, but in this case he was overpowered by the poet. The King, who understands these things, fortunately had the piece greatly shortened. I remarked to an old military gentleman who was sitting yawning at my side, and who did not, besides, understand one word of Italian, "In truth, the King is one of the best Princes who has ever lived; he has, more than ever, pity on his people." "How do you mean?" he replied. "Yes," I added, "he has shortened this opera by one half." I flatter myself that your Royal Highness has had some charming fêtes this winter, and good health. Above all things, Madame, take care of your health. It is this which we must wish you; for beauty, greatness, cleverness, the gift of pleasing, all are in vain if you have a bad digestion. Happiness depends on your stomach.

Really, Madame, I know more about "La Pucelle" than

your Royal Highness thinks. The Duchess of Wurtemberg did indeed pass a night in your castle to copy some fragments of it. But what is possessed at Vienna of this work, was got hold of during the battle of Soar. Whilst the King was occupied in fighting the regular Austrian troops, some hussars amused themselves in pillaging his baggage, and stole the "Siècle de Louis XIV" and what the King possessed of "La Pucelle," about 700—800 verses detached from the body of the work; so that "Jeanne" has been somewhat battered about, though she has not entirely lost her maidenhood. This Jeanne seemed always fated to be made prisoner during war. I composed two new stanzas about her a few months back, and introduced a certain burly Tyrconnel, but Tyrconnel was not successful.

Pardon me, Madame, but I have no space left to present to your Royal Highnessess the profound respects of

BROTHER VOLTAIRE.

POTSDAM,
10*th April*, 1752.

MADAME,

I have not had any news of the Marquis d'Adhémar for a year, who had much wished to be attached to your Royal Highness' Court, and whom you also seemed desirous of having in your house. He had till now not been able to surmount the difficulties placed in his way by his father, who is, as your Royal Highness probably knows, Great Chamberlain to King Stanislas at Luneville. He has at length informed me that he has succeeded in removing all obstacles, and that he is ready to come and lay himself at your Royal Highness's feet. I am ignorant, Madame, if you are still of the same mind regarding him. As all the appointments at your Royal Highness's Court are filled up, he would ask to be named Honorary Equerry. It is a post scarcely

known in France, and which, I think, corresponds with that of Master of the Horse. It is merely a title, and nothing more, and only important from the fact that it would not look well to appear to be a useless member of your Court. I remember that your Royal Highness decided that his salary should be 1500 crowns. This is the actual state of this little matter at the moment. I have answered the Marquis d'Adhémar that I was awaiting your commands, and I have committed your Royal Highness to nothing. I shall inform him, Madame, of your latest decision and of the orders with which you will honour me. All that I am certain of is, that I should like, in company with him, to swell the number of your courtiers, but Brother Voltaire does not know as yet when he will put his nose outside his cell. He is the best monk that ever existed, and has become too easily accustomed to a solitary life. I might be able to get leave and pay you my court after Prince Henry's marriage. However, I am certain of nothing, and resign myself entirely to the decrees of Providence. I am in hopes, Madame, that your health has escaped from those storms which gave cause for so much anxiety, and that therefore nothing may disturb the peaceful tenor of your existence.

Permit me, Madame, to renew for ever to your Royal Highness and His Highness, the expression of my profound respect and unalterable attachment. If I dared, I would add a message for M. de Montperni; but how could I take such a liberty?

VOLTAIRE.

20th April, 1752.

The penance which you impose on yourself has succeeded in appeasing my wrath. I had yet been unable to forget your indifference. It required not less than a pilgrimage to our Lady of Baireuth to wipe out your sin. Brother Voltaire will be forgiven at such a price. He will be

welcome there, and will find friends eager to oblige him and to show him their esteem. I still doubt in the fulfilment of your promises. Has the German climate been able in so short a time to reform French levity? The journey to France and Italy having been reduced to castles in the air makes me fear the same fate for this one. Be therefore more than German in your resolutions, and procure me soon the pleasure of seeing you again.

Although absent, you have had the faculty of making me shed tears. I saw your false Prophet given yesterday. The actors surpassed themselves, and you have had the glory of touching our Franconian hearts, which moreover resemble somewhat the rocks amongst which they live.

The Marquis d'Adhémar had M. de Folard written to four weeks ago. I forgot to aquaint you with it in my last letter. You can easily judge that his offers were received with pleasure. Montperni has consequently written to him. I hope that he will be satisfied with the conditions. They are more advantageous than those which he desired. They consist in 4,000 "livres," free table, and the keep of his carriages and horses. I beg you to finish your work, and to manage so that it should soon be terminated. I shall be under a great obligation to you for doing so. You know that the title he asks for is not one customary in Germany. As it answers to that of Chamberlain, he will have this title about me.

Time prevents my saying more to you about it to-day. Be persuaded that I shall always be your friend,

WILHELMINE.

It is not the qualities of the mind, but those of the character, which cause estrangements. Whilst Voltaire's wonderful intellect was irresistibly attractive, his personality was always repulsive to Frederic's nature; and in these conflicting

feelings will be found the clue to the instability of their friendship. Besides the affair with Arnaud and the lawsuit about the diamonds, the King had been much displeased at a visit the poet paid to the Russian Envoy, Mons. de Grass. The intercourse with foreign diplomatists was not approved of at Court at that moment. Not only had Voltaire acted in direct opposition to Frederic's wishes on this point, but he had allowed Mons. de Grass to infer that he had been sent by Frederic, when the supper incident was spoken of. In such matters the King would not allow himself to be trifled with. The welfare of his kingdom was of too paramount an importance to him that he should take the interests of private individuals into consideration. Throughout his reign he drew a distinct line between matters of State and those relating to his private life, and herein lay the secret of much of his success. During the day he was the King, and nothing but the King, and Mons. de Voltaire was unknown to him. Of an evening, however, at the suppers held at Sans Souci, or at the Castle of Potsdam where Frederic did the honours as host, Voltaire was his friend, his favorite, the King of the entertainment. The Poet could not understand nice distinctions; he was accustomed to the back door system and *petites entrées* of Versailles. There the King was the State, and the Sovereign was Madame de Pompadour, Voltaire's former intimate friend, with whom he was no longer on such good terms. Such a system of intrigue and underhand dealing had a great charm for Voltaire. He loved mixing himself up in politics and in meddling in the affairs of the State, but unfortunately this in no wise suited Frederic's views. The Hohenzollerns have at all times insisted on the same strict line being observed in the audience Chamber as on the drill ground.

Added to these provoking incidents before mentioned, ill-natured gossip, intrigues and unfortunate misunderstandings tended to increase the tension existing between Voltaire

and the King. Although Frederic was careful to observe all rules of civility towards his guest, and offer him all the advantages to be enjoyed at his Court, he nevertheless was increasingly distant and cold in his demeanour towards him. Voltaire brooded in silence over the King's altered manner, and resolved to induce the Margravine to influence her Brother in his favour. He would willingly have borne the King's anger, but this studied civility was unbearable to him. In Wilhelmine's letter to the poet of the 12th June, 1752, she mentions having written to the King on the subject, but it is nevertheless apparent that she would rather not be mixed up in this matter. She knew the King well, and being besides aware of the terms in which he had spoken of his former friend, was prepared for His Majesty's answer.

The following letter from Voltaire is interesting on account of his allusions to the King and his own disgrace. It contains besides some graceful little verses written in honour of the marriage of the King's second brother, Prince Henry, the future hero of Freiberg. He married the Princess of Hesse Cassel on the 25th June, 1752. Chevalier de Folard, mentioned in the letters, was the French Envoy at the Diet of Regensburg, and nephew of the celebrated Commentator of Polybius.

End of May, 1752.

MADAME,

I have not yet received any answer from the Marquis d'Adhémar. I wrote to him the same day as that on which I had the honour of receiving your Royal Highness's orders. It may be that he has addressed himself to M. de Folard, or that he did himself the honour of writing to your Royal Highness. Perhaps he has already the happiness of being near you without my having been informed of it here, in my complete and happy solitude at Potsdam. Or he has not yet been able

to make up his mind. It seems difficult, Madame, from what I see, to get hold of Adhémars and Graffignys, but it is quite easy to take possession of some poor Voltaires, people who are good for nothing, yet who devote themselves heart and soul to those whom they have the insolence of loving. I remained at Potsdam whilst the King, your brother, made war in the plains around Berlin. You are probably aware that he has had a long and severe attack of gout. Do you also know, Madame, that during the attack he put his swollen foot into a boot and was present at reviews held in the rain? Future generations will therefore not be surprised that he won battles. I admire him daily more, both as King and as man. His kindness and indulgence in society are the charm of my life. He had every right to say, as he did in one of his beautiful letters, that he was a stern King and a humane man; but I think he is far more the humane man than the stern King. His virtues and his talents, his philosophy, his abhorrence of all superstition, his retiring nature, the regularity of his life, his application, his mental research, as well as care for his kingdom, all these have attached me intimately and for ever to him. I shall never repent having given up everything for his sake. In truth, Madame, I really think your Royal Highness should warn him in one of your letters that he is turning my head. He inspires me with more enthusiasm than fanaticism does its devotee. But I do not speak to him of it, and he does not know the whole of my secret. I speak rather unreservedly to your Royal Highness of my attachment for you, and of my great desire of paying you my court at Baireuth, and of thus going from one paradise into another; but when will that be? I really cannot tell in the least. I am like Adhémar in respect to my journeys, who cannot make up his mind to migrate. What I do know, however, is this: that when once at Baireuth or at Potsdam, one never wishes to leave them.

You are going, Madame, to have a new sister-in-law. Preparations are being made for brilliant festivities, but in my eyes they will not in the least compare with those which I saw two years ago; you adorned them, and, besides, ought an old philosopher, living in retirement, to present himself to a newly-married couple? Am I made to be best man? I pray, as a good monk should, for all prosperity and success to Prince Henry.

"Ye joys and graces with the loves entwine,
And lightly hover where the Prince doth lie.
Fleet, youthful choir, your grief is less than mine,
That we, alas! have parted company."

I present my profound respects and unchanging devotion to your Royal Highness, and to the Margrave. Has M. de Montperni forgotten

Brother Voltaire?

Potsdam,
5th June, 1752.

Madame,

Brother Voltaire who is quite undone, brother Voltaire who is dying, interrupts his death throes to tell your Royal Highness that he believes that M. d'Adhémar is now in your service, and that he is aware of his good fortune. As to myself, I am no longer good for anything, and I do not understand how the King your brother has the kindness to let me remain. It is said that the Margravine of Anspach is at Berlin. A Margravine exists whom I should like to see return there, and I believe that the honour of paying her my court would restore me to health. Why should you not come there, Madame? People pretend that the plague is raging in the Upper Palatinate, it is perhaps not true; the most notorious facts do not reach Potsdam when the King is not there, and one is separated from mankind in

general. If the King is absent, everything stagnates. If it is true that the plague has appeared in your dominions, then Potsdam is a real safeguard; some detachments of tall grenadiers will be sent to fight it, and it will take to flight, as the Austrians did.

The Marquis d'Adhémar has written again to me to say that he would already have been at your Royal Highness's feet, but for a serious illness he has suffered from. I flatter myself that it was not the plague. Brother Voltaire prostrates himself on his pallet before your Royal Highness and the Margrave.

12th June, 1752.

The Marquis d'Adhémar has not yet arrived; we expect him at any moment. He has been ill, which has delayed his departure. I think it is much easier to have Adhémars and Graffignys than Voltaires. It is only the King who has the right to possess these. You make me experience the fate of Tantalus. You always flatter me by the promise of coming here, and then when I am expecting to see you, my hopes fade away. If you really had had the desire, you could have taken advantage of the King's absence; but you follow the maxims of many great ministers, who make fine speeches without results. I have written to the King what you asked me to do on his account. It is difficult to know him without loving and becoming attached to him. He is one among the number of those phenomena, which at most only appear once in a century. You know my feelings for that dear brother, so I break off short on that subject. We are at present leading a country life. I divide my time between my body and my mind; we must sustain the one, to maintain the other, for I observe more and more, that we think and act only according as our machine is wound up. You seem to have become very misanthropical. You remain at Potsdam

whilst the King is at Berlin, and you imagine that a philosopher does not suit a wedding. One can see that you have never tried marriage, and that you ignore that one of the essential points in that state is to be a good philosopher, above all in Germany. The four verses which you make on the subject seem to me rather Epicurian, and this Epicurianism is incompatible with misanthropy. You only require a new mania to take you out of your gloomy reflections, and to restore you to the love of pleasures.

The Margrave sends you many messages. Montperni is always among your friends. We often speak of you; but eccentric, and moreover overwhelmed with business, he cannot write to you. His pains are abating, but he still has them for several hours each day, and lives like a monk in order to try and get well. I only see him for a moment every day. He was the chief ornament of our little society. I hope Adhémar will supply the deficiency. Be persuaded that I am only looking for the occasions of convincing you of my perfect esteem.

WILHELMINE.

P.S.—The King told me when I was at Berlin that he wished to get "l'Esprit de Bayle" written. If this work is ready, and is to be had, I beg you to procure it for me. I have received the supplement to the dictionary written in England. To my mind, it is very inferior to the original.

POTSDAM,
June 17*th*, 1752.

MADAME,

Brother Voltaire does not know what he says; he will never believe what he hears discussed in his cell, whilst the hero of the report is not at Potsdam—poor man, having received the news of the arrival of a Margravine at Berlin

and of the plague at Augsburg, he begs your Royal Highness's pardon many times! All that he knows is, that the Marquis d'Adhémar swears that he is going to place himself at your feet if he is not there already. It would be well if Brother Voltaire never left his cell, but to go to your abbey. He renews his good wishes and his fervent prayers for the health, prosperity, and long life of your Royal Highness, but none for eternal life.

VOLTAIRE.

The Abbé de Prades had arrived at Berlin in the beginning of August, 1752. Voltaire took great interest in him, partly because he had been recommended by D'Alembert * to Madame de Denis, and by her to her uncle, and partly because he was one of the victims of the Parisian clergy, although an innocent one. In truth, they could not have done him a greater honour than to condemn his "Thèse" as heretical. The Sorbonne held that it contained matter which showed a strong leaning towards the English Deist doctrine. The Abbé awoke one morning to find himself considered as a danger to the State, and prosecuted by Parliament. He fled from Paris to Holland, and from there came to Berlin. The fact of his being condemned on account of his religious views was his best recommendation there. Voltaire and the Marquis d'Argens endeavoured to procure him an appointment at Court. He became Reader and Literary Secretary to the King; a worthy successor to La Métrie, being just as light-hearted, fat, and with an equally good appetite. He was always called "Frère Gaillard" by "La Bande." His deficiency in general knowledge was amply compensated for by his power of talk; the King mentions him as having been

* Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, famous mathematician and philosopher, one of the leading members of the Encyclopedists. Born at Paris, 1719, died 1783.

possessed of a marvellous pair of lungs. Voltaire's next letter contains a recommendation for the Abbé. Although he is not mentioned by name, there is no doubt that the references made relate to him. There was most likely some difficulty at first in procuring employment for him, and Voltaire may therefore have thought of recommending him to the Margravine, till on his return from Silicia the King took him into his own service. The Abbé, however, proved himself unworthy of the post he occupied, for whilst Frederic was at war with France, he was engaged in secret treasonable negotiations with the French Commander-in-Chief, notwithstanding all the favour and pecuniary advantages bestowed on him by the King. The Abbé seemed to have forgotten that honesty is better than patriotism. He was imprisoned in the fortress of Magdeburg, and for ever banished from the King's service.

Madame,

Brother Voltaire, as your Royal Highness perceives, only writes about the Almighty. He is also in a convent, where his salvation is being worked out. A much bigger volume would be made on the theological subject in question than that of the "Summæ-theologiæ of St. Thomas." He lays the accompanying essay at your feet. It is for your Royal Reverence to give judgment. There are in France monks of Fentevraux, who blindly obey an Abbesse. I feel I belong to these. Madame, do you require the service of a reader, with a strong chest and indefatigable intelligence, a theologian who does not believe in God, and as learned as a Lucraze, almost as stout as he is, and eating nearly as much, very serviceable and not expensive? If you do, I could procure him for your Royal Highness. You know I never make you useless presents, and that you can rely on the zeal which I shall have all my life for your service.

I have executed your commands respecting Baron de

Pölnitz. It is enough to restore him to health, and he is already much better. If I ever possess the health which the Author of natural religion has absolutely denied me, I shall certainly come to Baireuth to enquire after that of your Royal Highness! Baireuth is the church to which I wish to make a pilgrimage, there to worship as I would to God Himself, and to bow down before the august Saint to whom I pray with such deep respect.

Would the Margrave deign to accept my homage, and your Royal Highness graciously allow me to enclose a letter for M. d'Adhémar? I am much concerned about M. de Montperni. Your Royal Highness would lose in him a servant such as Princes do not often possess.

POTSDAM,

24th October, 1752.

MADAME,

Brother Voltaire, who has been dead to the world, in love with his cell and his convent, which he has not left for eight months, at last breaks through his silence for the sake of your Royal Highness. His separation from all human things has left him some weaknesses, and one of these, Madame, is entirely for you. He even thinks it is none, and that God will pardon him for retaining his attachment for one of his most perfect creatures. I take the liberty of sending you a small book of Devotions which I have written for my very Reverend Father in God, the philosopher of Sans Souci. I earnestly implore your Royal Reverence not to allow a copy to be made of it. The mysteries of the Saints must not be exposed to the eyes of the profane. This pious manuscript is written in very small characters, but the Marquis d'Adhémar or M. de Montperni, deacons of his church, can read it to you. I am very sorry to be obliged to presume only that M. d'Adhémar is with your Royal Highness, as I have no news from him for six months. If he is with you I am not

surprised that he should forget the human race. I am still always hoping to make a little journey to Italy, and to see the subterranean city before I die. But before going to see what is *under the earth*, I rely much on being able to pay my court to the most adorable being yet living *on earth*, and of renewing the expressions of ardent devotion borne to your Royal Highness by

BROTHER VOLTAIRE.

This letter would probably have reached the Margravine at Erlangen, a tower in the southern part of the Margravate of Baireuth. The Margrave was in the habit of spending some time each autumn there for the purpose of shooting. The Margravine did not accompany him on these expeditions, but remained at the pretty little castle from where she wrote the following answer. The short, philosophical treatise, in which Wilhelmine's warm feelings and speculative mind became apparent, is well suited to the locality in which she wrote it. She had founded a University at Erlangen in 1743, which continues of much repute to the present day, and is a seat of German learning, especially of Theology. On the occasion of the inauguration of this university, the pupil of Descartes had given the following sentence as a subject for discussion: "Matter can think." Voltaire had made the same assertion in his letters on Locke, following in the footsteps of his English master, who in turn had taken it from Spinoza, and worked it out according to his own theory. Spinoza held that mind and matter are one and the same thing, and that the supposed difference between the two proceeded from our own limited understanding. Locke went a step further, and maintained that the intellectual activity of man was caused by impulses of the functions of the human body. It is evident that this question occupied the minds of men a hundred, nay, a thousand years ago, as it does now. It still remains unsolved to this hour.

ERLANG,
Nov. 1, 1752.

It requires more intelligence and more delicacy than I possess, worthily to praise the work I have received from you. One should be prepared for everything from Brother Voltaire. The fine things he writes no longer cause surprise, admiration has long since succeeded to astonishment. Your poem on natural law has enchanted me. Everything is to be found in it; the novelty of the subject, the sublimity of the thoughts, and the beauty of the versification. Dare I say it? Only one thing is wanting to make it perfect. The subject requires to be treated at greater length than you have done. The first proposition, above all things, requires to be more fully demonstrated. Allow me to acquaint you with my doubts.

God, you say, has given to all men justice and a conscience to warn them, just as he has provided them with what is necessary to them.

God having given man justice and a conscience, these two virtues are innate in him, and become an attribute of his being. The necessary consequence of this is that he must act in accordance, and that he can neither be unjust nor have any remorse, as he can never overcome an instinct which is part of his being.

Experience proves the reverse. If justice were an attribute of our nature, then all quarrels would be banished; the lawyers would die of hunger; the parliamentary councillors would not occupy themselves, as they are doing, about a piece of bread given or refused; the Jesuits and Jansenists would confess their ignorance in matters of doctrine.

Virtues are but accidental and dependent on society. Self-love has given birth to justice. In early times men tore each other to pieces for mere trifles (as they still do nowadays); there was no safety either for your home or

your life. Mine and thine, unfortunate distinctions (on which too much stress is laid in present times) made all unions impossible. Man, enlightened by reason, and urged on by self-love, discovered at length that society could not possibly exist without order. Two feelings belonging to his being, and innate in himself, caused him to become just. Conscience was but the consequence of justice. The two feelings I wish to speak of, are aversion to suffering and love of pleasure.

Trouble can only beget sorrow, whilst tranquillity is the mother of happiness. I have made it a special study to thoroughly examine the human heart. I judge what I see by what has been. But I bury myself too much in this subject, and might see myself precipitated from the heavens like Icarus. I await your decisions with impatience; I look on them like oracles. Lead me in the paths of truth, and be persuaded that I have no more evident wish than to prove to you that I am your sincere friend,

WILHELMINE.

CHAPTER V.

At Berlin things were fast approaching that crisis which brought about the final and complete rupture between Frederic the Great and Voltaire. Two natures such as Maupertuis and Voltaire could not long exist side by side. The former was just as jealous as the latter. The peace which had hitherto reigned amongst the Knights of the Round Table of Sans Souci had been but a conditional one, maintained by social considerations. Already at the end of the year 1751 Pölnitz had written to the Margravine:

"Our 'beaux esprits' live in apparent cordiality. Mons. "de Maupertuis alone, who cannot endure seeing anyone else "enjoy the King's favour, is living at Berlin for the last three "months. The rest are most friendly, calling each other "'dear Isaac,'" (this was Voltaire's pet name for his dear friend the Marquis d'Argens, author of the "Lettres Juives"), "dear Marquis, dear Count. I am certain that in spite of "these affectionate demonstrations they would be delighted "to part at any price."

It is impossible to read the following account of the unhappy quarrel which put so complete an end to a friendship of many years' standing, without feelings of pain for Voltaire and those of pity for Maupertuis. Who was wisest of the two it is difficult to say, but who possessed the greater mind is easily to be guessed. Voltaire was the most distinguished, but Maupertuis was nevertheless the more powerful. He was President of the Academy of Science and Learning, which gave him a certain position, and he had besides a hold on Berlin society through his wife, who

afterwards became Mistress of the Robes to Princess Amélie of Prussia.

The dispute arose as follows: Maupertuis asserted having discovered a new Law of Nature—"The use of the minimum of power as applied to the action of bodies." This assertion Professor König, of the Hague, a mathematician, opposed in the most distinct manner. He said he could prove from a letter of the great Leibnitz—a copy of part of which he produced—that the philosopher had already in those days made mention of this particular Law, and had pronounced against it. Maupertuis, greatly incensed with this opposition, declared at a public meeting of the Academy, that the letter was a forged one. To vindicate his action König now produced the whole letter, as well as two others from Leibnitz on the same subject. Voltaire, who had never much cared for König, hailed his appearance on the scene of the dispute with lively satisfaction. He was longing himself to be in the midst of the fray, and had with difficulty kept silent. He wrote a letter purporting to be from a member of the Academy, in which he accused Maupertuis of plagiarism, and represented the influence he had exercised on the Academy as a pernicious abuse of his position. This letter was so defiant that an answer soon followed, written by the King himself, in which he defended Maupertuis by energetically declaring Voltaire's Letter to be "a dishonourable libel." Both letters were anonymous, but their authors knew each other perfectly. It is easily to be understood how painful it must have been for the philosophical master to find himself attacked by his pupil with the very weapons he had taught him to wield. There was, however, no possibility of retreat left to Voltaire; he was ready for action, and determined to fight "L'Aplatisseur de la Terre" to the bitter end, if possible to annihilate him completely. His pen seemed to have acquired fresh force and vigour, and his biting satire on Maupertuis' scientific crotchets, entitled

"l'Histoire du Docteur Akakia" was launched into publicity, adding fresh fuel to the fire. Maupertuis' cause was now lost, for it had been turned into ridicule.

Frederic had read the pamphlet in manuscript, and had been much amused at the way in which the learned President of the Academy had been made fun of. He had at the same time, however, begged Voltaire not to have it printed. In spite of this request it was nevertheless published, the poet having misused the King's permission for the publication of another work for this purpose. The copies were confiscated by Frederic's orders. As the pamphlet was forbidden to be sold in Berlin, it now reappeared at Dresden, where anything directed against Prussia was allowed to pass unpunished. The King could no longer tolerate these public insults heaped on the President of his Academy of Sciences. It was not the learned Maupertuis, it was his own office which was being held up to derision, and this could not be left unnoticed.

On the afternoon of the 24th December, Christmas Eve, when it is customary for all Berlin to be out in the streets, a great fire was lit in one of the open squares, into which the public executioner threw a quantity of books. Voltaire saw this autodafé from his windows, and suspecting what was taking place, sent his secretary to enquire the name of the book which was being thus destroyed. The answered returned was, "L'Histoire du Docteur Akakia." The flames, which were gradually disappearing on the snow covered ground, burst forth afresh in the poet's breast. The fire had not alone destroyed Doctor Akakia, but also what remained of Voltaire's devotion, respect, consideration, and gratitude for the King. He sent his order and the Lord Chamberlain's key of office back to Frederic, who however returned them to him, accompanied by a gracious message and an invitation to come to Potsdam and occupy his usual quarters.

It would have been impossible to understand how Voltaire and the King ever could have thought of keeping up their former intimate relations, had these two been looked on as ordinary commonplace mortals, and not as the striking historic personages they were. They both felt what important parts they played in the century's history, that a common tie bound them closely together—viz., that of elevating their times to a height never previously attained. This was the secret magnetic power which attracted them to each other, and which made them anxious, if possible, to begin the old life afresh, although estranged for a time. Intellect unites people, character separates them. The question may reasonably be put, whether Voltaire's character, such as it really showed itself, ever would have become apparent without that remarkable correspondence with the King? People whose intercourse has been confined to the exchange of letters should avoid a nearer personal acquaintance. The reality nearly always falls short of the ideal, and the consequent disappointment is apt to cause misunderstandings, not to say lasting estrangements.

Frederic and Voltaire bore the stamp of their time, a century of striking contradictions. Voltaire probably felt himself that the former intimate friendship between him and the King could never be re-established, although absolutely reconciled. The King writes as follows to his sister: "It is a great pity that, possessing so much talent, this madman should be so bad, and cause so much vexation, yet to many fools it will be a consolation, that, in spite of great intellect, one is not worth more."

Voltaire left Potsdam on the 26th March, 1753, for Plombières. On his departure he left three copies of his "Siècle de Louis XIV" as a gift for the Royal household, instead of any pecuniary gratification. His niece, Madame Denis, was to meet him at Frankfort. Arrived at Leipzig, he not only threatened Maupertuis with fresh libels, but

wrote insulting articles against the King, in the appendix of his novel "Zadig," and in "Les Voyages de Scarmentado." His pen seemed possessed by an evil spirit.

After spending a few days with the accomplished Duchess Dorothea of Saxe-Gotha, at the Castle of Friedenstein at Gotha, and with the Landgrave of Hesse Cassel, Voltaire arrived at Frankfort-on-the-Main at the end of May, 1753. Scarcely had he reached this town than he experienced a treatment at the hands of Prussian officials, which, had it not been explained away, must have left a stain on the King's reputation which nothing could have effaced. Frederic, however, declared that the only orders he had given to the Military Councellor von Freytag were to demand the order and Lord Chamberlain's key from Voltaire, as well as his letters and poems.

In later years Voltaire threw all the blame on Freytag only. The remembrance of those days roused such bitter feelings in the poet's mind, that he wrote, in 1757, to Marshal Richelieu, who with the French troops was on his march to Germany, "If you pass through Frankfort, Madame Denis earnestly entreats you to send her the four ears of those two villains, Freytag and his accomplice Schmidt."

The disgraced favourite delivered up everything demanded of him, as well as the volume of the King's poems which he had received on June 17th. As no order had arrived from Potsdam, although matters had been arranged and Voltaire had attempted flight, Freytag had him and his niece arrested on June 20. They were taken under an escort of soldiers to prison, where Madame Denis was exposed to the most disgraceful treatment, and kept in confinement till June 25th. Voltaire, however, remained a prisoner till July 6th, although an order for his immediate release had arrived on the 5th.

What irony of fate! Voltaire, the ideal of the Parisians, the

spoilt favourite of the great Frederic, given over into the hands of coarse, uneducated people, exposed to insult and outrage! Why the King did not ask for his poems back before the poet left Potsdam is but a natural question; the following reasons would give the best answer. It was not till Voltaire reached Leipzig, that the King became aware, from the poet's behaviour there, of the use to which he might put his poems. Many of these contained satirical attacks on foreign Courts, and especially against influential personages at Versailles. The King found that he had not been wrong in his apprehensions. To his poems, and also to the sharp and cutting remarks he had often made about those to whom the destinies of France were entrusted, Frederic owed many of his worst and bitterest enemies. Frederic the Great could win battles, but he could never restrain a satirical remark. Already, whilst at Berlin and Potsdam, Voltaire's thoughts and hopes were constantly directed to France. That which he had hoped to obtain in Prussia, viz., some diplomatic position, he now looked to find in his own country. In order to regain some of the confidence and favour he had lost in France, he betrayed the trust reposed in him at Sans Souci. Frederic had already found him out, whilst still apparently on intimate terms with him.

At the time Voltaire first came to Prussia and lived in daily and confidential intercourse with the Royal Philosopher, the words of a future poet seemed about to be realized, "that the poet and King should walk together, both living in regions to which other mortals could not attain." Most of the poets in similar positions had natures like Icarus, their imaginations raised them up to the sun, but they lost their balance and fell. Only Goethe understood how to maintain himself in such heights. In Voltaire's case this was impossible; his position and his theories were in perpetual conflict. He lived in the glare of a brilliant court, and sunned himself in the King's favour, whilst at the same time all his

energies were directed towards bringing about the downfall of monarchy.

And what was the end of all this? A prison at Frankfort! It was this catastrophe which roused the poet's hatred and resentment, and led him to commit so many unworthy actions against his former royal friend.

Madame Denis had written to the King on the 11th June imploring her uncle's release; she could address him directly, as a lady and as a Frenchwoman. There was no past to come between her and the King, as was the case with Voltaire. It must have required all her self-command to pen the letter to Frederic; for she hated the King, apparently on account of her uncle's treatment, but in reality because she had been compelled to live alone in Paris, far from him whose triumphs she was accustomed to share and to enjoy. Voltaire had also sent a letter to the Abbé de Prades, but no answer was vouchsafed either to Madame Denis or to the poet. It was difficult to understand the reason of this silence. The means of communication were indeed very deficient, and it took from four to five days to reach Frankfort from Potsdam. The King's journey would have increased any delay, but even taking all this into consideration there would have been ample time for some reply to have reached the unhappy petitioners.

Already, towards the end of the year 1752, soon after the publication of "l'Histoire du Doctor Akakia," Voltaire had sent the King a letter through the Margravine, in which he defended himself and endeavoured to regain his lost favour. Who could have possibly been a better mediator than Wilhelmine? Voltaire could only turn to her, as he felt uncertain whether Frederic would receive any communication from him. His letter to the Margravine tallied in every respect with the one his niece had written to Frederic. Both had exaggerated the facts, for they mention, amongst other things, having been guarded by twelve soldiers, whilst, in fact, there were only two; neither had the poet the intention

of going to Baireuth from Frankfort. He wrote the following letter on the same evening after he had been arrested.

MADAME,

May your Royal Highness's compassion be aroused, and may your goodness protect us. My niece Madame Denis, who had undertaken the journey to Frankfort in order to comfort me, and who counted on coming with me to lay ourselves at your feet, implores your mediation. A woman honoured and respected in Paris has just been taken to prison by Mons. Freytag, the resident official of His Majesty the King, your Brother. This man in the King's name has dragged her through the crowd to the same house to which I have been transferred; they have taken her maid and her servant from her, four soldiers are posted before her door, the official spends the night in her rooms, and this is the reason of it all. When Mons. Freytag arrested me, in the King's name, on the 1st June, I handed over to him all those letters from His Majesty which I had been able to preserve. He asked me for a volume of the King's poems; this book was packed away in a trunk which was to leave Leipzig for Hamburg. Mons. Freytag signed two notes for me, written in the following terms: "As soon as the box is returned, and the volume of poems the King desires restored to him has been handed over to me, you are free to leave and go wherever you please."

The book in question arrived on the 17th. I wished to start to-day, the 20th, having fulfilled all my engagements. They have arrested my secretary, my niece, and me. We have twelve soldiers guarding the doors of our rooms. At this moment, whilst I am writing, my niece lies in convulsions. We feel certain that the King would not approve such horrible violence.

Deign, Madame, to send him this letter. Deign to assure him that in the midst of such unheard of misfortunes I shall die, filled with the same feelings of veneration, and the same

attachment to his person. I implore him once more most humbly for forgiveness of my faults. I always thought that he would have allowed me to try and defend myself against Maupertuis. But if this displeases him, there shall never again be a question of it. Once more, Madame, my heart has not failed, and never will fail the King, and it will ever remain filled with the deepest and most tender respect for your Royal Highness.

Alas, it was formerly

BROTHER VOLTAIRE.

FRANKFORT, 20*th June, At ten o'clock at night.*

Voltaire's letter reached Baireuth seven days later, and on the 29th June the Margravine wrote to the King from The Hermitage in the following terms: "I have just received a "packet from Voltaire and Madame Denis, which I am bold "enough to send you. I am sorry that they should have "turned to me, and fearing lest I might get entangled in this "bad business, I send you, dearest brother, every communi- "cation I have had from them.

"If Voltaire has been wanting either by word of mouth or "otherwise, in the proper respect due to you, then I consider "him the most wretched and unworthy of beings. Such "behaviour can only draw down the contempt of all honour- "able people upon him. Yet his age, his physical weakness, "and the loss of his reputation in consequence of this un- "fortunate catastrophe, fill me with pity for him. A man, "when driven to despair, is capable of anything. In your "opinion, dear brother, I may perhaps think too highly of "him with respect of his intellectual powers, but I feel sure "that in your heart you will not upbraid me for my pity. "Even a criminal may expect that much, when he is un- "fortunate."

Wilhelmine in reality pitied Voltaire more truly than she dared avow to her brother. She did not deny Voltaire's faults, but she could understand them.

The King would have infinitely preferred that Voltaire should have gone straight to Baireuth, instead of going to Gotha and to Frankfort. He would have been able to send some one there to ask him to return his key of office and the papers in question; but this would, on the other hand, have placed the Margravine in a painful position, and it is natural that she should have been anxious to be spared this, and under the circumstances prevented Voltaire and his niece coming to Baireuth. The following lines, written to her brother, show how keenly she felt the rupture between the poet and Frederic, and how desirous she was of acting the part of peacemaker. "The letters Voltaire has written to "his friends here (which were written without the slightest "feeling of suspicion or distrust, and only shown me after "much entreaty) speak of you with the utmost respect. He "considers you, and justly so, as the great man that you are. "He complains of the preference you have shown Mau- "pertuis, and of your prejudice towards himself. His "sarcastic remarks on the former are so comic, that I assure "you, my dear brother, I was unable to read them without "laughing."

On the 7th July the King replied to his sister that he had already, a fortnight before this, sent orders for Voltaire's release, and that of his niece. This order was already in the hands of the official, but, being of a timorous nature, he had thought it necessary to wait for an answer to a report he had meantime sent to the King, even if Voltaire should thereby be detained as a prisoner for a few days longer. In his despair the poet at last mustered up courage to address the King directly, sending his letter by the Margravine, to whose influence he finally owed his liberty.

FRANKFORT,

June 17, 1753.

I take the liberty of most earnestly entreating your Royal Highness to deign to forward this petition to His Majesty. Our only hope is in his protection. The cruel condition in which I find myself is the excuse, if I am only able to write these few lines watered by my tears.

I lay myself at his feet.

VOLTAIRE.

CHAPTER VI.

Voltaire at length left Frankfort on July 7th, 1753. He went by way of Mayence and Worms to Mannheim and the Castle of Schwetzingen, where the Elector Theodore, of the Palatinate, received him most kindly, and overwhelmed him with honours. From Schwetzingen he went to Rastatt and Kehl, making a stay of some days at Strasburg. The thought of a possible return to Potsdam now began to occupy Voltaire's imagination. It would almost seem as if he had felt that there, after all, he had had a home, an asylum for his liberty of thought; that he realized that he had held a distinguished position at the brilliant Court, and had been honoured with the friendship of a great Sovereign, whom he could in return look up to and esteem. No fanatical priests existed at Potsdam, as they did at Colmar, who could force him to send for a Capucin monk at Easter, and confess, in order to prove his innocence of State intrigues. Where could he find such a resting place? Surely not in France, where a longer stay was impossible; he had been given to understand this from Paris. Voltaire still hoped for a reconciliation with the King, and if anyone could bring this about it was the Margravine.

Strasburg,

22nd December, 1753.

Madame,

I should consider myself guilty towards your Royal Highness and untrue to my dearest feelings if I did not write to you on this occasion.

The Duchess of Gotha has filled me with surprise and gratitude, by informing me that she had instructed M. de Gotter to speak to the King, your brother, and to implore your pro-

tection on my behalf with him. Your Royal Highness knows I have never wished for any other. Had it not been for the fatal circumstance of my niece's journey, I should have come direct from Leipzig to Baireuth, to lay myself at your feet. The harm has been done, but is there no remedy? The King's philosophy, your humane nature, your advice, your prayers, will all these be of no avail? Who will tell the truth to a great man, if it be not you, Madame? I own it, I have said so. I have written it to the King, and shall maintain it as long as I live, that I erred in being thus obstinate; but, Madame, is this a State crime? It is literary childishness, a quarrel about algebra, a mere nothing; and it is for this that I was kept a prisoner for six weeks at Frankfort, that I lost the season at a watering-place whilst seriously ill, that my niece was dragged by soldiers through the streets of Frankfort, that a wretched being who had been alone with her all night, got rid of her servants and tried to outrage her! These deeds of violence were committed by a certain Freytag, who called himself one of the King's ministers. The King does probably not know that this man had been condemned to the stocks, and to hard labor at Dresden. All these terrible circumstances are well known at all other Courts, but his Majesty may be ignorant of them.

And as to myself, what is my position? I am old and infirm, I had sacrificed the last remaining years of my life to the King, and for three whole years I have only lived for him. All my time was devoted to him, and I gave up myself to work all my time for him, he knows it, will he therefore only remember a literary quarrel? I must tell you the truth, Madame, for it is right that your Royal Highness should know it! The whole mischief was caused by the letter the King had published against König and against myself, at a time when he was unaware of the dispute. I do not say this in order to lessen the blame attaching to myself. I shall always acknowledge that I was much in fault not to

have kept silent, and to have been so obstinate. Surely fifteen years of the greatest devotion should excuse a momentary outburst of bad temper. I venture to ask your Royal Highness to be the judge of this. I appeal to you whether it does not tend more to the glory of a great man to forget a fault, and only to remember past services. Shall so many mementos of the correspondence the King honoured me with, and of my idolatry for him, remain to posterity for it only to say: The end of all this was a prison, and insults offered to an innocent woman?

Ah! Madame, does glory only consist in possessing a fine Army? The King your brother loves true fame, and he deserves it; he loves you, and therefore will believe you. Madame, it is an opportunity of showing the true greatness of your heart, and of touching his. Do just as you think best, I leave myself entirely in your hands. I will mention nothing to your Royal Highness of what is said at Versailles, at Vienna, or at Paris, or London; you must listen to your heart alone, and it is to that of the King that you must appeal. You will succeed, as you have undertaken to do so. My heart will for ever be filled with the most profound and tender respect for your Royal Highness. Will your Royal Highness permit me to lay myself at the Margrave's feet.

Formerly Brother Voltaire?

This is a curious letter. According to a communication from the Marquis d'Argens to d'Alembert, it would seem that the Margravine had endeavoured to make peace between her brother and Voltaire. But her efforts proved fruitless, as did also those of the Duchess of Gotha. The King was not to be moved. Voltaire was, and remained to him, nothing more than "formerly Brother Voltaire."

"With reference to yourself, dear sister," Frederic had written to Wilhelmine on April 12, 1753, "I would advise

"you not to write to him yourself. I have already been "caught by doing so." This warning, which the Margravine may have looked on as a command, is in all probability the reason that no more letters from her to Voltaire are to be found from that period till 1757. It is likely that the intimacy was kept up by Adhémar and the Marquis de Montperni. Although Wilhelmine had become more cautious, her friendship for the poet remained unimpaired, and it was owing to her that an apparent intercourse between the King and Voltaire was maintained. The poet wrote her civil letters, and sent her books, amongst others the "Annales de l'Empire," which he was writing at Gotha, and afterwards completed at Colmar. In 1754 he was able to send a few printed copies of his latest historical work to his friends at Baireuth.

COLMAR,

25th January, 1757.

MADAME,

I lay this fresh expression of my devotion at your Royal Highness's feet, and beg you to believe that Brother Voltaire is always the same; he has only changed his cell; he has not changed in feeling, and perhaps some day the very renowned and very respectable Father Superior will know that his monk has never failed him, and will retain his devotion till the grave.

I entreat your Royal Highness to permit me to present, through your hands, which beautify all they touch, this humble work to him who has ever been the object of what I thought, and of what I wrote, and who is, like yourself, the best judge.

I shall remain all my life, with the profoundest respect and inviolable attachment to your Royal Highness, the very humble and very obedient servant,

VOLTAIRE.

Will you allow me to enclose two copies in this packet for M. d'Adhémar and M. de Montperni ?

The Margravine had faithfully discharged the commissions entrusted to her. On the 10th of March (1754) the King sent her the following reply: "I was much surprised at receiving the book from Voltaire with a long letter. I will have it acknowledged by the Abbé de Prades, so that I may not compromise myself in any way."

Ten months had elapsed when, on October 23, 1754, the hermit of Colmar suddenly received a message which caused him as much surprise as it did satisfaction. "Sister Wilhelmine" announced her arrival at Colmar to "Brother Voltaire," and begged him to come and see her.

The Margravine's increasing delicacy of health had given cause for serious anxiety, and the milder and softer air of Italy and the South of France was deemed an imperative necessity. She was on her journey thither, and was anxious to see her friends.

Voltaire hastened to fulfil the request; "the meeting was a most touching one." He stayed to supper, and spent eight hours in the society of his friend. Their conversation was the more unrestrained as the Margrave was not expected to arrive till next day. During these hours the ties of friendship, which time had perhaps loosened, were strengthened anew. How much had they not to say to one another!

Wilhelmine endeavoured to pour oil on the troubled waters, and to heal the wounds which the sad occurrences at Frankfort had made. She was at no small pains to-day to convince him that the King was not so much to blame, and endeavoured to overcome his hatred and anger against him. The Margravine gave him a costly present, and finally asked to see Madame Denis, who came and paid her respects next morning. The days and hours spent at Rheinsberg, Baireuth, and Sans Souci, were recalled; Voltaire and the Margravine discussed the theories of Descartes, Locke's

"Essay," and laughed and joked about "La Pucelle." "She overwhelmed me with kindness," the poet writes; "she "made me a beautiful present. She insisted on seeing my "niece. In one word, she had but one thought, that of "making up for all the evil wrought me in her brother's "name. We must own that women are worth a deal more "than men. It has all seemed to me like a dream."

The Margravine met Voltaire again at Lyons, where she made a lengthened stay. Here she saw much of the Cardinal Tencin and the Jesuit priests, so much so, that one day the news reached Berlin that "the Margrave and Margravine had become Roman Catholics." Voltaire hastened to pay his respects to Cardinal Tencin, Archbishop of Lyons. Having passed through the long passages leaning on his Secretary's arm, he entered the Cardinal's audience room alone, but returned a few minutes later, deeply wounded and offended at the reception he had met with. He had scarcely made his bow, when the Cardinal told him he could not invite him to dinner, as he was in such bad odour at Court. This uncivil treatment was fully made up for by the enthusiasm with which he was received by the public, and by the Margravine's gracious behaviour. Voltaire had left Colmar with the intention of settling down near Lyons for the rest of his life. His old enemies the Jesuits, however, had made it impossible for him. They had openly burned Bayle's Dictionary* at Lyons, and were bitter to a degree in their hatred of Voltaire. "Dear Friend," he had said to his secretary after his interview with Tencin, "this country does not suit me; and what Kings cannot give, or rather, what they take from one, are peace and liberty." The old, frail poet was therefore forced to begin his wanderings afresh, and to seek a resting place in Switzerland.

* A historical and critical Dictionary compiled by Bayle, who held very advanced views, in which Voltaire shared.

At first he bought "Maurion," a house situated in a vineyard between Lausanne and the Lake of Geneva. He only lived there a short time, as he missed the many comforts to which he and his niece (a spoilt Parisian lady) were accustomed. He therefore moved to a larger house, "Les Délices," and established himself there in a grand style. It was all the more surprising, as he had always been considered a great miser. His income at that time amounted to 160,000 francs,* resulting from lucky financial speculations, and not so much from the sale of his literary works. With these latter, *i.e.*, his manuscripts, he had very bad luck. Voltaire was a most careful and anxious writer, and following Horace's principles, kept his manuscripts for years in his desk before publishing them. Many of his books would never have appeared during his lifetime, had he not been forced to publish them by the appearance of copies, printed from manuscripts which he had from time to time given to Royal personages or friends. Such had been the case with "La Pucelle," and also with his poems, which appeared with the incorrect title of "Sur la Religion naturelle." He had written it hastily for the King of Prussia, and sent a copy of it to the Margravine. Meanwhile a very faulty edition of it was published at Paris. The Margravine alone could have lent the manuscript. Voltaire himself remarked to his friends that "she must have made copies of it." He could not tell her so to her face, so he accused a certain princess of Passau Saarbrück, who never existed, of being the culprit.

The following letter is of interest, as it may, perhaps, be of use in deciding the literary dispute as to whom Voltaire's poem on 'La Loi naturelle' was dedicated?"

La Harpe asserts that it was first dedicated to Frederic the Great, and then to the Margravine, "with whom he spent

* £4,000 a year.

some time, after his quarrel with Frederic." However, as the poet was not at Baireuth, but on a visit to the Duchess of Gotha at that period, it must have been to the latter. Collini, Voltaire's secretary, affirms this, and so does the author himself in a letter to D'Argental, written on 22nd March, 1756. "I am informed that 'La Religion naturelle' "has been printed for the Duchess of Gotha, as well as for the "King of Prussia." It would therefore appear from this that there were three dedications, one to Frederic the Great, one to the Duchess of Gotha, and the third to the Margravine, but this latter is supposed to be the only really authentic one.

In the poem, "Sur le Désastre de Lisbonne," which Voltaire mentions in his letter of the 17th February, 1756, to the Margravine as "another sermon," he endeavours to contradict Pope's maxim, "All is good." He will not allow that the hope of a better and higher existence hereafter can in any way compensate for the sufferings and troubles endured here on earth. For Voltaire, there did certainly still exist some hope in this life, and that was to regain the King's good graces. He again corresponded with the "Solomon of the North," who sent him replies through the Abbé de Prades. The historical events of the next years seemed to be centred in Sans Souci. New dangers threatened, and new wars awaited the King. All Europe seemed to rise in arms against him. England alone stood by him, and the sympathy felt for him in that country is well expressed in a letter of Pitt's: "I feel the most grateful "sentiments of veneration and zeal for a Prince who stands "the unshaken bulwark of Europe against the most powerful "and malignant confederacy that ever yet had threatened "the independence of mankind." Frederic concluded the important treaty with England, 1756.

All this took place without Voltaire, and the road leading from the Lake of Geneva to Sans Souci seemed barred to him for ever.

Maurion, near Lausanne,
17*th February*, 1756.

Madame.

You are one of those divinities who are made for the purpose of scattering gracious kindnesses. It is said that God does no evil, but that He permits it.

The Princess of Passau-Saarbrück has sent a particular work on natural religion to Paris, and I can swear to your Royal Highness that I have never given away a single copy of it, except to you alone. The King your brother has never dispossessed himself of the original. It was a very crude poem. I have corrected it a good deal lately, and this is how it commences :—

" Queen without pomp and unbeset
" By woman's weakness, woman yet,
" In reason manlike, firm and wise,
" Rather thy precious qualities
" Than the seductive fires that fly
" Forth from the loadstar of thine eye,
" Draw me to thee. Thou worthy sign
" Of God's own handiwork divine,
" Know we our master," &c.

After this little beginning your Royal Highness cannot fail to take the sermon and the preacher under your protection. The King, your brother, adds to his glory, which seemed impossible to increase ; he makes treaties, which are worth more than victories, he keeps strangers aloof from his country, he strengthens the thrones of other sovereigns, and makes his own secure. But this is not all, he sends me my "Mérope," converted by himself into an opera. All this is very fine, but he fails to love me.

Will your Royal Highness deign to be amused by another sermon which I have the honour to send you, and then judge between Pope and myself. I pray that everything may be well at all times with you. I lay myself at his

Royal Highness feet, and at yours, with the profoundest respect and the eternal zeal of Brother

VOLTAIRE.

Voltaire's "Essai sur l'Histoire générale" appeared at the end of the year 1756, a book which proved how incapable the eighteenth century was of rightly estimating the historic value of the past, especially of the middle ages. Copies of the work were sent at once to the author's friends, and to the Margravine. Almost at the moment when all were reading the chapter containing the account of Henry IV's murder by Ravaillac, the news arrived from Paris of the attempt made on the life of Louis XV by Damien, a former servant in a Jesuit College. The King had been wounded in the side with a penknife, whilst getting out of his carriage. Voltaire was greatly excited by the news, less, perhaps, from affection for his sovereign, whose "gentilhomme ordinaire de la chambre" he had still remained, as from hatred to his old enemies, the Jesuits. Damien, Voltaire was convinced, was their tool, and this deed had done them greater injury than the King, of which he was heartily glad. This time, however, Voltaire did them injustice. Damien had no accomplices; he represented the national feeling which had been roused by the opposition of the Parliament. This attempt on the King of France's life was among the "extraordinary news" of which Voltaire speaks in his next letter. It is probable that a detailed account of the event was enclosed in the letter. He had received close on fifty letters about it from Paris, showing how great the excitement was.

MADAME,

Allow me to reiterate my prayers for your Royal Highness' health, and to thank you for the assurance

given me by the Marquis d'Adhémar of the continuance of your favour.

I take the liberty of sending you news from Paris, which may strike you as extraordinary, and will exercise your philosophy.

I am ignorant if your Royal Highness has received the copies of the History which I lay at your feet. I flatter myself that the King your brother will continue to furnish modern History with the most brilliant subjects, but to Cæsar alone it belongs to write his own commentaries.

I am still persuaded that he will remember that he made me leave my country, that it was for him I gave up my King, my employment, and my family.

If he were at Berlin, I should take the liberty of asking him to send me some melon seeds, and I would beg for your Royal Highness' protection. But he has other things to do than to honour my kitchen garden with his melons. Will your Royal Highness and the Margrave always deign to accept the profound respect and prayers of Brother

VOLTAIRE.

In a letter of the 18th February, Voltaire mentions an invitation he had received from the Empress Elizabeth of Russia to go to St. Petersburg, also the change which had taken place in the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and the pass to which things were brought, when verses were written in honour of Madame de Pompadour, as had been the case with the Abbé Bernis, Voltaire's enemy, then his friend, and finally neither. He was sure the Abbé would seek revenge for the contempt with which Frederic had mentioned him in the following line, "Évitez de Bernis la stérile abondance." A remark of that kind, made by a King, remains an everlasting wound to a vain and conceited poet. Why had the King not been more cautious? Was he not aware that

everything was possible at Versailles, and that an Abbé, although not possessing the talent of a Richelieu and Mazarin, might yet become Minister? Would not Madame de Pompadour's creature seek to revenge himself, and perhaps in the most unpleasant manner? A coalition between France and Austria would have placed the Prussian hero in a most awkward position. As the letter has no individual interest it is not given here. Voltaire was not the least anxious to go to Russia, still less so since Russia had joined the Austrian-French alliance. The French were on their road to the Westphalian provinces of Prussia, and the Russians would not long delay to invade Prussia from the other side. Voltaire writes he does "not wish for Kings or an autocratic Empress," but he desires the restitution of his order and key of office from Frederic, "ces brimborions" as he calls them, to which, however, he attaches great importance. He makes indirect allusions to the sacrifices he has brought to the King, but he is careful not openly to express the wishes which lay nearest his heart. He has retired into private life, only now and then he has a longing to gain fresh laurels at the theatre of the amiable and beautiful Marquise Gentil de Langalerie, instead of at that at Lausanne. He becomes more and more identified with the small world of that town; even a troupe of amateurs act better in his eyes than the actors on the royal stage at Paris.

MAURION,

5th March, 1757.

MADAME,

Will your Royal Highness deign to continue your favours to me, may God protect you from the Russians, and me, poor frail creature, from the ice of Petersburg! I was tempted one fine sunny day, to visit next summer this capital of a new empire, whose history they wish me to write. I said to myself, "I will go to Baireuth, and

"lay myself at the feet of my protectress. I shall obtain "passports from the King, her brother, which I shall owe "to the protection of his benevolent sister!" The north winds, the respect I have for the hussars, and the excellent assistance a traveller meets with in Poland, have destroyed my castles in the air, and I have reduced myself to acting the part of the good fellow "Lusignan," in "Zaïre," before a grave Swiss audience. In truth, our troupe would not have been unworthy of appearing before your Royal Highness.

There is a talented girl at Geneva, Madame, who sings almost as well as Mademoiselle Astrua, and who is especially inimitable in comic operas. Not that operas are given at Geneva, only psalms are sung there. I noticed in times past that your Royal Highness was inclined to attach to herself a person of talent and intelligence. This young lady, who is of very good birth, would be far more suited for the Court of Baireuth than for Geneva. We must not, however, speak of amusements when everything is preparing itself for so serious a war. The Court of Versailles has just made eight "Marshals of France," and fifty thousand men are actually starting for Flanders; at least the Quarter Masters have already left. The King, your brother, will be within reach of performing far greater deeds than he has yet done. Thence he will turn again to philosophy, for which he is born as well as for heroism, and he will call to mind a man who for his sake had left his country. He does not know how much I was attached to his person.

Your chamberlain, Madame, who is returning from Italy, knows that one can live happily in my little retreat near Geneva called "Les Délices," but he is aware too, that a man who has paid his court to your Royal Highness cannot live in happiness anywhere else. Will you permit me to offer a thousand prayers for your health, nature has endowed you with everything else. But of what use are

beauty, greatness, cleverness and charms, when the body is suffering?

Will your Royal Highness and the Margrave accept the profound respect and fervent prayers of Brother

VOLTAIRE.

AUX DÉLICES, ON THE LAKE OF GENEVA,
15*th July*, 1757.

MADAME,

Brother Voltaire will never cease in his devotion for your Royal Highness, and you will therefore permit me to join the number of those who deplore the death of your Royal mother deeply, and who at the same time wish the worthiest daughter of the departed the longest and happiest life.

Oh! Madame, it is no small thing to be happy, in fact it is easier to perform great deeds than to preserve the true peace of mind; and, although glory and fame are dearly bought, yet they are far less rare than this happiness.

Your Royal Highness has lost a mother; you see your brother constantly exposed to the greatest dangers, and war is raging on the borders of your country. Ah! Madame, how much more enjoyable were those days when you so admirably represented Roxane at your theatre, and I had the honour of personating the part of Acomat, when I appeared in a Chinese costume, and was witness of the beautiful *fêtes* you gave your Royal brother.

I was very happy then; I was daily near your Royal Highness, lost in admiration of your many talents and graceful ways, and listening to the sound of your voice. I do not know what will be the end of this cruel war, which paralyses all Germany; but of this I am certain, that there is no one more worthy of devotion or more amiable than the Margravine of Baireuth. Friend and foe agree on this point; it is an article of faith which no one dares to attack.

I hear with pleasure that your health is improving, and that you have no reason to miss the climate of Provence and Italy. Baireuth must be a pleasant residence in spite of being so near to the seat of war. Perhaps one of your gentlemen who is travelling has told you that you are really worshipped in the little Hermitage on the Lake of Geneva. You have altars wherever it can be imagined.

I pray that your Royal Highness and the Margrave will continue your favour towards me. A few months ago, His Majesty the King, your brother, was gracious enough to write to me again; I should not dare take such a liberty as to answer him, save through your Royal Highness's kind offices, which you will always grant to Brother Voltaire; be assured of his deepest respect.

Voltaire was becoming a landed proprietor in his old age. Besides Maurion and a house in Lausanne he had, before acquiring Ferney, bought a charming villa in the neighbourhood of Geneva, called by him Les Délices. He had left Lausanne to establish himself near Geneva, where the presence of the famous doctor Tronchin was the great attraction. As long as he was near him, Voltaire felt he could not die. What a curious fancy, for the older he grew, the more charm life seemed to have for him.

It is from "Les Délices" that Voltaire's next letters are written. From his peaceful retreat he observed with philosophical satisfaction "that the Sovereigns of Europe "did not enjoy the same peaceful repose." Half Europe had risen in arms against the Prussian King, and on the 18th of June, 1757, he sat on a fallen tree near the battlefield of Kolin drawing figures in the sand, lost in thought, and quite stunned by the terrible disaster which had overtaken him, who was only accustomed to be victorious. The following letter from the Margravine to her friend at Geneva gives a graphic account of the troubles and dangers which beset her brother.

28th October, 1757.

Your letters have all safely reached me. The agitation of my mind has so weighed down my body, that I have been unable to answer you sooner. I am surprised that you are astonished at our despair. News must but rarely reach your Cantons, since you are ignorant of what is taking place in the world. I had the intention of giving you a detailed account of the series of our misfortunes. I shall do so but briefly. The battle of Kolin was already won, and the Prussians were masters of the battle-field on a hill on the right wing of the enemy, when a certain evil spirit, whom you never liked, took it into his head, against the express orders he had received from the King, to attack the main body of the Austrians, which caused a great gap between the victorious left wing of the Prussians, and the main body of the enemy. It also prevented this wing from being supported. The King filled up the gap with two regiments of cavalry. A discharge of artillery caused them to retire and take to flight. The Austrians, who had had time to recover themselves, fell upon the flank and rear of the Prussians. The King, in spite of his skill and exertions, was unable to remedy the disorder. He was himself in danger of being taken prisoner or killed. The first battalion of the foot guards gave him time to retire by throwing itself in front of him. He saw his brave men massacred, all of whom perished with the exception of two hundred, after having inflicted cruel slaughter on the enemy. The blockade of Prague was raised next day. The King formed two armies. He gave the command of the one to my brother of Prussia, and kept the other himself. He drew a line from Lissa to Leitmeritz, where he pitched his camp.

Desertions began to take place in his army; out of thirty thousand Saxons, there scarcely remained two to three thousand. The King had Nadasti's army facing him, and

my brother, who was at Lissa, that of Dawn. My brother drew his supplies from Zittau, and the King from Leitmeritz. Dawn crossed the Elbe and stole a march on the Prince of Prussia. He took Gabel, where there were four Prussian battalions, and marched on Zittau. The Prince hurried off to go to the succour of this town; he lost his train and his pontoons, the carriages being too large and unable to pass through the narrow mountain roads. He arrived in time to save the garrison and part of the magazine. The King was obliged to re-enter Saxony. The two combined armies encamped at Bautzen and Bernstadt; that of the Austrians between Görlitz and Schonau, in unassailable positions. On the 17th September the King marched against the enemy, in order to try and take Görlitz. The two armies, face to face, kept up an ineffectual cannonade, but the Prussians gained their end and took Görlitz. They pitched their camp then upon the heights of Javernic, extending from Bernstadt as far as the Neisse, where General Winterfeld's corps lay, and was beginning to extend itself as far as Radomeritz. The army of the Prince of Soubise, having combined with that of the Empire, had advanced to Erfurt. It could have cut off the passage of the Elbe by establishing itself at Leipzig, which would have made the King's position a most dangerous one. He therefore left the army, the command of which he entrusted to the Prince of Bevern, and marched with all speed and great secrecy on Erfurt. He very nearly surprised the army of the Empire; but these timid troops fled in disorder into the impenetrable mountain passes of Thuringia, behind Eisenach. The Prince of Soubise, too weak to withstand the Prussians, had already retired thither. It was at Erfurt, and afterwards at Naumburg, where fate launched her poisoned arrows against the King. He was informed of the shameful treaty concluded by the Duke of Cumberland, the march of the Duke of Richelieu, the death and defeat of Winterfeld, who was attacked by the whole of Nadasti's corps, consisting

of twenty-four thousand men, he only having six thousand to defend himself with; he heard of the entry of the Austrians into Silesia, and of that of the Swedes into the Ulter-Mark, where they seemed to be taking the route to Berlin. Add to all this, *from Memmel to Königsberg, Prussia is reduced to a complete desert.* Behold a sample of our misfortunes. Since then, the Austrians have advanced on Breslau. The skilful tactics of the Prince of Bevern has prevented their laying siege to it. At this present time they are occupied with the siege of Schweidnitz. A party of them, numbering four thousand men, has levied contributions at Berlin itself. The arrival of Prince Maurice made them evacuate the King's country. I have just been told that Leipzig is blockaded, that my brother of Prussia is very ill there, the King is at Torgau, judge of my anxieties and my sufferings. I am scarcely in a state to finish this letter. I tremble for the King, and that he may take some violent resolution. Good-bye; wish that I may die, it is the happiest thing which could happen to me.

WILHELMINE.

Four nations, France, Austria, Russia, and Sweden, were allied against Frederic and his people. How could he withstand them? The first and important point was to sever the alliance between France and Austria, and to induce the former to make peace. At the Court of the Margravine lived a certain Louis Alexandre de Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau, one of the same family from which the famous revolutionist Mirabeau descended, and who was besides a relation of the Abbé Bernis, afterwards a minister. Riqueti was sent by the Margravine to Paris with the full knowledge of the King. He was empowered to see the Marquise de Pompadour, and to offer her half a million thalers* if she

* £75,000.

would make peace. The mission failed. Louis XV.'s favourite could refuse half a million, but could not forget the sarcastic remarks the Prussian King had made about her. The knowledge of these remarks Frederic owed to his friend, who had treacherously let them reach the Marquise's ears.

Up to this time the correspondence between Voltaire and Wilhelmine had, with a few exceptions, been of the most amusing kind; but now that sorrow and trouble had overtaken the Margravine, the letters bear the impress of this terrible period of despair and danger. It was at this moment that the brother and sister showed themselves to their greatest advantage, Frederic in his undaunted courage, and Wilhelmine in her unselfish devotion.

But Voltaire's character, on the other hand, shows much indecision, which is the case with people who, like him, are governed by momentary impulses, and not by firm principles. Voltaire was unable to separate the interests and feelings of his own person in judging of things; he was never consistent, except in his negation of all that was positive. On the one hand he spread malicious reports about Frederic, whilst on the other he flattered him. One day he speaks of having invented a new weapon of war against him, and the next he extols his victories with pride. His whole nature seems made up of contradictions and ambiguities. But even he must have been touched by the cry of despair from Baireuth. Such was the sister's distress, that in her love and devotion to Frederic, she was ready to start for Paris herself to settle matters for him. Her character was calculated to bring matters to a satisfactory issue, had not her enfeebled health prevented the execution of such a plan.

The following letter from Voltaire is evidently an answer to one from the Margravine, which, however, is not in our possession :

At the "Délices,"
August, 1757.

Madame,

My heart is more than ever touched by the kindness and confidence your Royal Highness deigns to show me. How is it possible, then, that I should not be enthusiastically moved by it? I observe that it is only your beautiful soul which makes you unhappy. I feel myself born to be devoted with idolatry to superior and sensitive minds, which think as you do. You know how much at heart I have always been attached to the King your brother. The more my old age is tranquil, the more I have given all else up, the more I make a home of my place of retirement, the more I am devoted to this philosophical King. I write nothing to him but what I feel at the bottom of my heart, nothing but what I believe to be perfectly true; and if your Royal Highness thinks my letter a proper one, I entreat you to forward it to him, as was the case with the former ones.

Your Royal Highness will find things in this letter bearing upon matters which have already engaged your thoughts. Although the first suggestions regarding peace have failed, I am persuaded that they will in the end meet with success.

Permit me to venture to communicate to you an idea of mine. I fancy that the Marshal de Richelieu would be flattered if he was addressed personally. I believe that he thinks that it is necessary to keep up a balance, and that he would be glad if the interests of his King and master coincided with those of his allies and of your own. If upon any occasion you wished to have him sounded, it would not be difficult.

Nobody would be more fit than M. de Richelieu to take such a ministry. I am bold enough to mention this, Madame, in the supposition that the King, your brother, should be obliged to take this decision, and I venture to say that in this case he would be under great obligations to you. As to this

idea, it is not even a suggestion, far less advice, which it does not pertain to me to dare to give; it is a simple wish which has its origin in my zeal alone.

VOLTAIRE.

19*th August*, 1757.

One only knows one's friends when one is in trouble. The letter you have written to me does much honour to your manner of thinking. I do not know in what way to show you how sensible I am of your conduct. The King is as much so as I am. You will find a note enclosed herewith, which he has ordered me to send you. This great man is always the same. He bears his misfortunes with a courage and firmness worthy of him. He was not able to copy the letter he was writing to you. It began with some verses. Instead of throwing sand over it, he took the inkstand, which is the reason that it is destroyed. I am in a terrible state, and I shall not survive the destruction of my house and my family. It is the only comfort which remains to me. You will have some fine subjects for tragedies to work out. Oh! times! Oh! morals! You will perhaps cause tears to flow by an illusive representation, whilst one contemplates with dry eyes the misfortunes of a whole house, against whom at bottom there is no real cause of complaint. I cannot say more to you on this subject; my heart is so troubled that I do not know what I am doing. But whatever may happen, be assured that I am more than ever your friend.

WILHELMINE.

AT THE DÉLICES,
29*th August*, 1757.

MADAME,

I have been moved to tears by the letter your Royal Highness has honoured me with. I should ask your

permission to come and lay myself at your feet, if I could leave my unfortunate, and I venture to say, respectable niece, who has followed me in my retirement, and who has given up everything for my sake. Yet in my obscurity I have not for a moment lost sight of your Royal Highness and your august house. Your generous heart, Madame, is undergoing severe trials. What has happened in Sweden, what is taking place in Germany, tries your sensitiveness. It is to be presumed that the storm will not extend to your states, but your soul experiences all the shocks, and it is through your heart alone that you can be unhappy. May such well founded alarms not injure your health. But those about you will look to this better than I can. It is much to be desired for your sake, for Germany, and for Europe, that an honourable peace, based on all the old treaties, should put an end to so much trouble and to so many misfortunes. But it does not appear to me that this peace is so near.

Under these circumstances, Madame, may I be permitted to place this letter, that I have ventured to write to his Majesty the King, your brother, under your protection. Your Royal Highness will allow it to reach him if you think it proper. In any case, you will become aware of my sentiments, and I am sure that you will approve of them. Meanwhile I shall never consider things desperate as long as the King has an army. He has often conquered, and can conquer still, but if time and the number of his enemies leave him nothing but his courage, this courage will be respected by Europe. The King, your brother, will always remain a great man, and if he experiences misfortunes like so many other Princes, he will have a new kind of glory. I wish he were persuaded of his own personal worth, for he has reached that point where many people of all ranks respect him more as a man than as a King. Who, Madame, must feel more than you do, what it is to be superior to one's birth. It would take up too much time were I to say all I thought, and all that my tender

respect inspires me with. Deign to read the heart of Brother

VOLTAIRE.

12th September, 1757.

Your letter has greatly touched me, and the one you addressed to the King has produced the same effect on him. I hope that you will be satisfied with his answer, as far as it concerns yourself; but you will be as little so as I am, with his resolves. I had flattered myself that your reflections would have made some impression on his mind. You will perceive the reverse in the note enclosed. It only remains to me to follow his fate, if it is unfortunate. I have never prided myself on being a philosopher, I have tried to become one. The little progress I have made has taught me to despise greatness and riches; but I have found nothing in philosophy which could heal the wounds of the heart, except the means of getting rid of one's sorrows by ceasing to live. The state in which I am is worse than death. I see the greatest man of this century, my brother, my friend, reduced to the direst extremity. I see my whole family exposed to dangers and perils, my fatherland torn by merciless enemies, the country in which I am perhaps threatened by the same misfortunes. Would to God that I alone had to bear all the troubles I have just described to you; I would endure them with fortitude.

Forgive me for this detail. You encourage me by the interest you take in what concerns me, to open my heart to you. Alas, hope is almost banished from it. Fortune, when it changes, is as consistent in its persecutions as it is in its favours. History is full of these examples, but I have nowhere found any in it, to compare to those we see, nor so inhuman and cruel a war among civilized populations. You would groan were you aware of Germany and Prussia's sad situation. The cruelties which the Russians perpetrate in

this latter country make nature shudder. How happy you are in your hermitage, where, resting on your laurels, you can philosophize in cold blood on the errors of men. I wish you all the happiness possible in it. If fortune favours us again, count on my entire gratitude. I shall never forget the proofs of attachment you have given me, my tender feelings are guarantees to you for it; I am never a friend by halves, and I shall always truly be one to Brother Voltaire.

WILHELMINE.

Many compliments to Madame Denis; continue, I beg of you, to write to the King.

CHAPTER VII.

Voltaire again assumed the part of a diplomatist and secret agent, and was this time more skilful and successful, for the first of the four previous letters would really do an experienced politician honour, without taking his friendly feelings into account. Frederic was really inclined, and did in fact follow Voltaire's suggestion, and entered into negotiations with the Marshal de Richelieu. The Marshal was an enthusiastic admirer of the King, and adhered to the traditional hatred of his family against the house of Hapsburg. At Versailles, however, there was a certain amount of sympathy for Austria, notwithstanding the lack of common interests between the houses of Bourbon and Hapsburg. The alliance was more one of mutual spite against Prussia. Frederic sent Colonel Von Balbi disguised into Richelieu's camp, and although his mission was unsuccessful, still the time which the negotiations occupied was a gain. Wilhelmine had forwarded Voltaire's note to the King, who had replied to it in the following somewhat curt terms: "I have been informed of the interest you take in "my successes and my reverses. Nothing remains to me "but to sell my life for the highest possible price." It is to be observed that Voltaire's attitude during this period did not please Frederic, yet at the same time he was unwilling to reject his propositions. It is possible the King had not much hope, but he was nevertheless anxious to find a way out of these labyrinths. The unfortunate retreat of the Prince of Prussia, the loss of the magazine of Zittau, the defeat of the Duke of Cumberland at Hasterbeck and the consequent convention of Closter-Seven, the unsuccessful

fight by Moys, the death of General Winterfeld, the Swedish invasion into Pomerania, that of the Austrians into Silesia, and the march of General Hadik on Berlin—everywhere defeats, disasters; these were too much for a human being to bear with equanimity.

> Vaincu, persécuté, fugitif dans le monde,
> Trahi par des amis pervers,
> Je souffre en ma douleur profonde
> Plus de maux dans cet univers
> Que dans les fractions de la fable
> N'en a jamais souffert Prométhée aux enfers.

Is it to be wondered at, that the thought of death should have been full of comfort to him. With death he would find peace, liberty, deliverance. "I am determined to throw "myself upon the first General among the enemy who "approaches me near enough in battle, at the risk of what-"ever may happen. I shall thank God for His clemency "if He allows me to die sword in hand."

These words were addressed by Frederic to his sister on the 17th September, 1757. "You are the only thing which "remains to me on earth," he continues, "it is you alone who "attach me to it; my dearest friends and relations are in "the grave, I have lost everything." No, he had not lost everything, for his sister remained to him, to share his misfortunes and to speak to him words of comfort and encouragement. She was in a most precarious state of health at this time, and these constant anxieties doubtless hastened her end. "Oh! my dear Brother, whatever may "befall you, I shall not survive you," and she kept her word, this faithful sister, by her death on the night of Frederic's defeat at Hochkirch.

The moment of greatest despair in Frederic II's life is expressed in a few lines he wrote to the Marquis d'Argens, but it was only for a moment that his courage was near

sinking; a letter to Voltaire shows him the undaunted hero of old.

"Je vais en effrontant l'orage
"Penser vivre et mourir en roi!"

The Margravine sent then this verse to her "Swiss friend" on the 16th October, and adds the following lines.

16*th October*, 1757.

Overwhelmed by the sufferings of mind and body, I can only write you a little letter. You will find one enclosed herewith, which will reward you a hundred-fold for the brevity of my own. Our situation is always the same. A grave is the limit of our view. Although everything seems lost, things remain to us which cannot be taken from us; they are fortitude, and the feelings of the heart. Be persuaded of our gratitude, and of all the sentiments which you deserve by your attachment and way of thinking, worthy of a true philosopher.

WILHELMINE.

On the 5th November, 1757, the King gave the order from the Herrenhaus at Rossbach to "march." This day was to decide his fate, and the cannonade at Rossbach dispersed the dark clouds which had gathered round him; at the Castle of Baireuth, Wilhelmine sat waiting for tidings of victory, hope, and life! The next letter describes the eventful day at Rossbach.

23*rd November*, 1757.

My body has succumbed under the agitations of my mind, which has prevented my answering you. I shall entertain you to-day with far more interesting news than that concerning myself. I had informed you that the allied army had blockaded Leipzig; I continue my narrative. On the 26th

the King threw himself into the town with a corps of ten thousand men; Marshal Keith had already done so with a similar number of troops. A lively skirmish took place between the Austrians, the Imperial troops, and the Prussians; these latter gained the whole advantage, and took five hundred Austrians prisoners. The allied army retired to Mersebourg, burned the bridge of that town and of Weissenfeld; the one at Halle had already been destroyed. They pretend that this quick retreat had been caused by the earnest representations of the Queen of Poland, who foresaw, with good reason, the total ruin of Leipzig if the siege were continued. The plan of the French was to become masters of the Sale. The King marched on Mersebourg, where he fell upon the French rear-guard, gained possession of the town, and took five hundred French prisoners. The Austrians who had been taken in the skirmish before Leipzig, had been shut up in an old castle on the walls of the town. They were obliged to give up their abode to the five hundred French, because it was more convenient, and they were transferred to the Bridewell. It is in order to make you aware of the attentions shown to your country that I tell you these trifles. Marshal Keith marched to Halle, where he reconstructed the bridge. The King having no pontoons, made use of trestles, on which boards were fastened, and in this manner restored the two bridges of Mersebourg and of Weissenfeld. The corps he was commanding joined that of Marshal Keith at Bornerode. This latter had been reinforced by eight thousand men under the command of Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick.

On the 4th they went to reconnoitre the enemy, who was encamped on the heights of St. Micheln. The position being one which could not be attacked, the King pitched his camp in a plain at Rossbach. He had a hill with a gentle slope in his rear. On the 5th, whilst the King was quietly dining with his generals, news was brought him by two of the

patrols that the enemy were making a movement on their left. The King got up from table; the cavalry, which was out foraging, was recalled, and they remained quiet, thinking the enemy were marching on Freiburg, a little town which was in the rear, but it became apparent that they were drawing near the left flank of the Prussians. Upon this the King struck his camp, and filed off to the left on to the hill. This was done *au galop* both by the infantry and by the cavalry. This manœuvre was, according to all appearance, executed to deceive the French. This army in confusion, at once as if by magic, was ranged in battle order in one line. The artillery then opened a terrific fire, so that the French to whom I have spoken, say that each discharge killed or wounded eight or nine men. The musketry fire took equal effect. The French continued to advance in column, in order to attack with the bayonet. They were not more than a hundred yards off from the Prussians, when the Prussian cavalry, making a *détour* on the flank of the French cavalry charged with incredible fury. The French were thrown into confusion and fled. The infantry, attacked in flank, overwhelmed by the artillery fire, charged by battalions and the regiment of gensdarmes, were cut to pieces and entirely routed.

Prince Henry, who commanded on the right of the King, gained the greater part of this victory, in which he received a slight wound. The loss of the French is very great. In addition to the five thousand prisoners and more than three hundred officers taken in this battle, they lost nearly all their artillery. In fact, all I tell you I have heard from fugitives and from the reports of some Prussian officers. The King only had time to notify the victory to me, he has not been able to send me any account of it. The King singles out and cares for the French officers, as he would do for his own. He has had the wounded dressed in his presence, and has given the most precise orders that they should want for nothing. After

having pursued the enemy to Spielberg, he returned to Leipzig, from where he started on the 10th to march on Torgau. The Marshal-General of the Austrians, who had appeared to intend entering the province of Brandenburg with thirteen to fourteen thousand men, retired to Bautzen on the approach of the Prussians. The King is pursuing him in the hopes of being able to attack him. His plan is then to enter Silesia. Unfortunately we have to-day learned the fall of Schweidnitz, which capitualated on the 13th, after having sustained an assault. This news causes me the greatest anxiety. To reply to the subject of your two letters, I wish to tell you that deafness is becoming an epidemic evil in France. If I dared, I would add that blindness is combined with it. I could tell you many things by word of mouth I cannot entrust to my pen, which would convince you of the good intentions that there have been. They still exist. I will write on the first occasion to the Cardinal.* Assure him, I pray you, of all my esteem, and tell him that I persist in my system of Lyons, but that I wish much that most people were of his way of thinking, as in that case we should soon be in harmony. I am very mad to mix myself in politics; my mind is fit for nothing else but for a hospital. You make me exert mind and body in order to write such a long letter. I can only procure for you the pleasure of narratives. I must take advantage of these, as I cannot give you better ones, and such as my gratitude desires. Many compliments to Madame Denis, and count on having no better friend than

WILHELMINE.

The period from the 18th June till the 5th November, 1757, brought that crisis in the life of the King which we can so often trace in the histories of great heroes. That crisis

* De Tencin.

involved the terrible alternative "to stand or to fall." Great men are, we might almost say, a destiny in themselves, and on them depends the fate of nations and of kingdoms. In this particular case, the past and the future of Prussia's crown, honour and existence were at stake. It was at the moment of his direst misfortunes that Frederic attained the height of his greatness. If the desire to make a name for himself had tempted the King, at the age of twenty-eight, to declare war, not the less was he now, at the age of forty-five, imbued with the conviction that he was the chosen tool of Providence, destined to work out Prussia's welfare under unheard of difficulties. He saw that it was a struggle of historical importance, that it was not Prussia and Austria who confronted each other, but the power of a spirit in the world fighting for supremacy over an old and decaying order of things.

Voltaire was truly devoted to the Margravine, but equally so to the King. He loved him with the passion a poet displays for his hero, and could not look on with equanimity at the defeat of a great and powerful man by a combination of smaller powers. He saw that a separate peace with France was the only thing which could save his royal friend, while it was the best way for France to extricate herself from a bad business. Voltaire therefore advised the Margravine to enter into negotiations with the French Court through the agency of the Cardinal de Tencin, Archbishop of Lyons, formerly Minister of Foreign affairs, who still exercised great political influence at the Court of Versailles. We remember Wilhelmine's stay at Lyons, and the exchange of civilities between her and the Cardinal, and we also call to mind the visit Voltaire paid to him there. The poet, however, overcame his bitter feelings at the treatment he had then received, out of devotion to the Margravine, out of interest for Prussia, and not least, because of his love for political intrigue. He knew Tencin, and also knew that a

Cardinal's hat was no compensation for an office of State, and that since he had left the Ministry, he was more than ever inclined to mix himself up in the affairs of France. It was not the Cardinal who took the initiative in this matter, but Voltaire himself. This becomes evident through the recently discovered correspondence between him and the banker Tronchin. Tronchin was brother to the famous doctor at Geneva, and was acquainted both with the poet and Tencin, who availed themselves of his services in financial speculations. The banker at Lyons was the Cardinal's agent, as the Margravine was her brother's, whilst Voltaire was the channel of communication between France and Germany. Wilhelmine besides had the assistance of the Marquis d'Adhémar and Spada, whom she had taken into her confidence, and who carried on most of the correspondence.

It is remarkable, that among the letters which passed between the Margravine and her brother, as well as among those of the King to Voltaire, those from the poet are wanting, which bear reference to these negotiations. Probably most of them were written to the Marquis d'Adhémar, and those addressed to the Margravine were sent on to the King.

On October 24th, 1757, Voltaire received a communication from Tronchin, in which he stated that the Cardinal would be willing to forward a letter from the Margravine to Louis XV. Wilhelmine informed her brother of this fact. Even the battle of Leuthen, on the 5th December, 1757, did not interrupt the negotiations. Frederic was still anxious to rid himself of the French, whilst the Court of Versailles was more inclined to listen to propositions.

The Margravine seems to have written two letters to the "Chapeau rouge," as she jokingly calls Tencin. The first was full of conventionalities, in the second she would most likely have entered more fully into the subject, and her letter to Louis XV was enclosed in it. These two she sent to Voltaire, accompanied by the following lines.

27th December, 1757.

If my body was to lend itself to the promptings of my mind, you would receive news from me by every post. I am, you would tell me, *as eccentric as you are, and yet I write.* To this I reply, that there is only one Voltaire in the world, and he must not judge others by himself. But enough of this frivolity. I see your impatience to be informed of things which interest you. A battle won, Breslau in the King's power, thirty-three thousand prisoners, seven hundred officers and fourteen generals taken, besides a hundred-and-fifty cannon, and four thousand waggons containing provisions, baggage and ammunition, is the news that I am able to give you. I have not done. Four thousand dead were left on the battlefield, four thousand wounded were found at Breslau, and the deserters are calculated at four thousand five hundred. You can count on this being a fact, not only acknowledged by the King and the whole army, but even by a crowd of Austrian deserters who have been here. The Prussians lost five hundred killed, and have three thousand wounded. This action is unique, and seems fabulous. The Austrians were eighty thousand men strong. The Prussians only had thirty-six thousand. The victory was hard fought for, but the whole affair only lasted four hours. I do not feel happy at this prodigious change of fortune. I must add one more anecdote. The corps commanded by the King had marched forty-two German miles in a fortnight, and had had only one day to rest before fighting this memorable battle. The King can say as Cæsar did: "I came, I saw, I conquered." He has informed me that he is at present only troubled how to feed and where to post this enormous number of prisoners. The letter you wrote him, in which you ask him for the account of the battle of Merseburg, was carried off with mine. Happily, there was nothing in it which could do you any harm. I

address the enclosed letter for the "Chapeau rouge" to you. As to trickery, there is none; as to soft words, I will not answer.

We had three days ago three shocks of an earthquake, four miles from here. They say the first shock was severe, and that subterranean noises were heard. No harm has been done. There is no example of such a phenomenon in this country. I leave it to you to find out the reason of it. Many compliments to Madame Denis. Be persuaded of all my esteem.

WILHELMINE.

The next letter, written on June 2nd, 1758, shows Wilhelmine's wonderful intelligence, and the power she possessed of not only grasping ideas, but also of judging facts in their real importance. The position of Europe seemed to be clearly defined before her. She had no other end in view but the peace, happiness and welfare of the world in general. Everything she says on the subject is simple, true, and to the point, yet in perfect harmony with her warm-hearted disposition. The two great victories gained by her brother helped to cheer her up, but her anxiety for him remained unabated. She sees him threatened with the fate of Orpheus, to be torn in pieces, but not like the poet, through ardent love, but through the revengeful hatred of three women, Madame de Pompadour, the weak-minded Elizabeth of Russia, and the embittered Maria Theresa, whilst the English, "un peuple avare," were watching the course of events. She longed for peace to put an end to her country's woes.

2nd January, 1758.

For thank heaven, we have finished the most disastrous of years. You say so many kind things to me for the present one, that they form one reason the more for my gratitude. I wish you everything that can make you

perfectly happy. As regards myself, I leave my fate to destiny. We often form desires which would be very prejudicial if realized, therefore I make none. If anything in the world could satisfy my wishes, it would be peace; I think as you do about war, and we have quite a third who certainly share our views. But can we always act up to what we think best? Must we not submit to many laws established since the world began? Man runs after the glitter of reputation, everyone seeks to find it in his calling and in his talents; we desire to immortalize ourselves. Ought we not to seek for this chimeric glory in the true or the false ideas man sets up for himself? Democritus had good reason to laugh at human folly. I see, on the one hand, a hypocrite taking part in processions and supplicating saints, occupied in setting all Europe by the ears, and depriving it of its inhabitants. I see, on the other hand, a philosopher causing (although with regret) oceans of human blood to flow. I see an avaricious people combined to ruin others for the sake of their riches. But enough! I could see too much, and that is needless. You must content yourself this time with what I say and with my reflections, for I have no news since the last letter you received from me. What you propose to me is a little dangerous. I explain myself upon this subject in the letter which I send you. I come back to my old saying, people are deaf in your country. If I could speak to you, you would possibly judge differently to what you do. The King is in the position of Orpheus, if his good fortune does not extricate him. He wishes for peace, but there are many *buts*. If peace is not made before the spring, all Germany will be ruined and desolated. The state in which it already is, is terrible. However wise the measures adopted, violence and pillage cannot be guarded against. I should never finish if I gave you a detailed account of the misfortunes which overwhelm us. It is a shame, that in this civilized

century, people should behave with such cruelty. The King does not suffer from it. In spite of all that is said, the Saxon people love him, but the aristocracy hate him, because they are deprived of the pensions and salaries they draw. Atrocious calumnies are circulated about him. Can they be believed? They emanate from his enemies. Envy has persecuted all great men, animosity must be added to it. Would that we were deaf, when she shoots forth her poisoned arrows! . . . . . Once more I must end, I perceive that I am saying too much. Be persuaded of all my esteem, and that I shall always be, all my life, the true friend of the Swiss Brother.

WILHELMINE.

The "Pandours," or rather hussars, commanded by the Austrian colonel, the Prince of Coburg, were marching in the neighbourhood of Baireuth, and had seized letters from the Margravine and Voltaire to the King. An occurrence which proved the necessity of caution caused Wilhelmine to write the following gracefully expressed letter. Measures had been taken that the peace negotiations should not again be interrupted by Austrian hussars. To write about peace, and to speak with the Cardinal Tencin of other important matters, would have been most dangerous, as the Prince of Coburg would certainly read the intercepted letters. Who would, however, have discovered that the plan for an Italian comedy was the cloak used to disguise the negotiations for peace, and that the "sœur Mézetin" was the Margravine of Baireuth? It is certain, however, that in this manner the correspondence was enabled to be carried on without the risk of a third person understanding what the letters really meant.

LETTER FROM THE PANDOURS TO BROTHER VOLTAIRE, 1757.

Why do you call us villains? We pillage, we sack and we are privileged thieves, that is true. For being

such, are we more guilty than those who govern the world, those authors who steal others' thoughts, and the saints of paradise who, in order to build churches, appropriate to themselves the goods of the nation and of private people? Surely not. Do us therefore more justice, and wish, instead of abusing us, that the Sovereigns of Europe may for the future follow our example, that they may become as eager to possess your letters as we are, that they may learn from their perusal to become philosophers, and Pandours of virtue. If we ever have the happiness of catching you, we shall endeavour to pillage your mind and your knowledge, out of revenge for your contempt. Our Rosinantes will then be metamorphosed into a Pegasus, and we shall know with the help of a certain lady, who calls herself Reason, how to prevent your making "neuvaines" against us.

P.S. I have received all your letters, and answer them all at once. Your plan for the Italian comedy is not quite accurate. But it would ill befit me to criticize your works. The sister "Mézetin" dares not meddle with what does not concern her, besides which, it is very dangerous to undertake to act a comedy, as one runs the risk of being carried off by Pandours, or that the part should be intercepted. It is more than four weeks that I have no news of the King. It may be that he has written to me, which I certainly think he has, but I fancy the letters have taken a route which does not lead here.

It is said the French have had a slight repulse at Bremen, and that seven thousand men were beaten. The Swedes are at their worst in Pomerania. Their cavalry had retired to the Island of Rügen. Their infantry is blockaded at Stralsund, where they are going to be bombarded. This is all I know. My brother of Prussia has sent me this letter for you. You can see from the date how regularly letters reach here. I pity your blindness, only to believe in one God, and to deny J——! How will you have your cause

pleaded? If anything could still divert me, it would be to see your apology. Good bye. Please let me have news of you, and above all of my lover, Heaven grant that it may be good.

WILHELMINE.

I forgot to tell you that it is I who am the Pandour. I made a mistake, and sent the King a piece of blank paper instead of your letter, which I have found again. I have sent it off. If it arrives safely, you will soon have an answer.

The news, alas, was anything but good. The Cardinal wrote a letter to Louis XV, enclosing one from the Margravine. The answer which he, however, received, nearly caused the Cardinal to become as red as his hat from anger and vexation. Louis XV, in a most curt answer, informed him that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs would send his Eminence a reply to his communication. Thus the great Cardinal received the answer he was to send the Margravine from the little Abbé de Bernis. It contained a refusal of the proposals for peace. Cardinal Tencin died a fortnight after this occurrence, and Voltaire declares his death was caused by disappointment at this letter. Madame de Pompadour's hatred of Frederic the Great, and the flattering terms in which Maria Theresa addressed her, proved more powerful than the voice of reason and consideration for France's real interests.

If Voltaire really intended (as he says in his Memoirs he did) merely to take part in these negotiations, in the hopes of seeing Cardinal Tencin meet with failure, he must have deceived himself. He never could have said so had the Cardinal succeeded, and peace been made. Voltaire certainly makes many satirical allusions to Tencin in his correspondence with Tronchin, more particularly with respect to an answer which the Cardinal gave the Pope in the year 1741. The latter

had expressed his fear that the alliance of France with Prussia, during the Bavarian war of succession, would render "Le Marquis de Brandebourg" too powerful! To this Tencin is said to have replied, "Your Holiness need have no apprehensions. France will be able to humble this heretic as easily as she has raised him up." There can be no doubt that Voltaire ardently desired the success of the undertaking, as he had hoped, were the result favourable, that it would have brought about a reconciliation between him and the King. These hopes he expressed in the following letter, in which he speaks of the peace negotiations, and then of the victories obtained by the King, first at Rossbach over the French, then at Leuthen over the Austrians, and finally at Zorndorf over the Russians.

SIRE,

I have received the gracious letter you have written to me, "the Swiss," concerning the general peace, made or ready to be made through the mediation of his Excellency de Spada. I was greatly pleased that they should commence by hanging several ministers, but I should like to know if they will die in fours or in sixes. I am amazed, Sire, at his Majesty the King, who goes about so, who beats three great nations one after the other. I have written to a learned Benedictin, my cousin, that he should be pleased to search among all his books if any mention be made of another man like his Majesty the King, and I await his reply. I thought I had approached (that is now five years ago) this great man, but it was not he. You know that the one I saw had a gentle face and large blue eyes, and he had a most agreeable nature, very agreeable, my good Sire, and that he was very witty, and he composed the prettiest stanzas in the world, as much in prose as in verse, and that he was very philosophical. Oh! it is he, whom I shall always regret, for I also am a philosopher, I am, but only at intervals. I am very fond of

a great King, who is all over a man. I think, God forgive me, my good Sire, that I will come and see him when he has leisure, for I have a great curiosity for rarities. But I am so old, so old, my good Sire, and he so very great, that I shall never have strength to go.

We say prayers every day in our holy Church for his holy preservation. All our Brothers give you the kiss of peace.

At the time the following note from Voltaire reached Baireuth, Wilhelmine was lying dangerously ill, and her days seemed numbered. Yet her spirit and her mind remained as strong as of old, and all her thoughts seemed concentrated on the one beloved object, her brother. To her, her life had been one long pilgrimage of suffering. The last anxious weeks between the battles of Kolin and Rossbach had broken her heart, it was only with difficulty that she struggled on till at last her body succumbed. In July, 1758, her weakness had so increased that the letter she wrote to the King, congratulating him on his victory at Zorndorf, was scarcely legible. Voltaire had been kept informed of her dangerous condition, which doubtless caused him to betray his great anxiety in his letter to her.

At the Délices,
27th September, 1758.

Madame,

If this note should find your Royal Highness at leisure and in health, I would implore you to have this answer of "the Swiss" sent to the great man your brother. But my urgent care is to beg you to send a detailed account of your illness to Tronchin.

You have never had, Madame, so many reasons to love life. You do not know how precious that life is to all those who have had the happiness of approaching your Royal Highness. Be sure that if there is anyone on this earth

capable of giving you relief and of prolonging your precious existence, it is Tronchin. In the name of all thinking beings, do not neglect to consult him, Madame; and if it were necessary that he should come to see you, or if, were he unable to do so, he thought you might undertake the journey, there would not be a moment to lose; you must live, all else is nothing, I am filled with grief and anxiety, and these feelings outweigh the profound respect and tender devotion of the old Swiss hermit.

VOLTAIRE.

I hope the Margrave shares my opinion?

This last letter was written like that to the Marquis d'Adhémar, on a sheet of paper of small octavo size. Both letters were found together as they had arrived at the Castle of Baireuth a hundred and six years ago, only a few days before the death of the Margravine.

Wilhelmine, who had ever been so ready with her pen, was no longer able to use it, not even to bid a last farewell to her friend. Yet, in token of how much her thoughts were with him, she sent him her picture a fortnight before her end, as a last message of friendship and gratitude. Soon her spirit would fathom the great mysteries which had occupied her during her life. Who is there who would not believe in affection's double-sight? In the same night, at the same hour in which her brother suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Austrians at Hochkirch, Wilhelmine breathed her last, 14th October, 1758. Her last words, her last thoughts, were for the happiness and welfare of the King. She desired to have her brother's letters buried with her. This wish was, however, not fulfilled. At her especial request the funeral oration to be held at her grave was to contain but little mention of herself, the vanity of all human things being made the chief subject of it. She was buried, according to her instructions, in the simplest and quietest

manner in the Chapel of the Castle of Baireuth, a striking contrast to that love of pomp and outward show with which she had always been credited.

The impression which the news of the Margravine's death produced on Frederic the Great is best shown by the account given by his reader, De Catt, in his journal kept at that time. It will not be out of place to give some extracts from it here.

"The Marquis d'Adhémar, Chamberlain to the Margra-
"vine," writes De Catt, "announced that this Princess was
"very ill, and that her weakness gave cause for the gravest
"apprehensions. I gave the King the letter. 'Ah! my
"dear friend, it is a letter to prepare me for the worst. I am
"sure that dear sister is no more. I received the fatal letter on
"my return from a visit to the camp, and to make my sorrow
"greater, had to compose my countenance, in order that my
"guests should not perceive the sorrow which overwhelmed
"me. Nearly all my people take fright if they imagine
"they see a cloud on my face; they at once believe that the
"affairs of the State are desperate.' The King then recited
"the following verses from Iphigenia to me:

"'Juste ciel c'est ainsi qu'assurant ta vengeance
"Tu romps tous ressorts de ma vaine prudence,
"Encore, si je pouvais, libre dans mon malheur
"Par des larmes au moins soulager ma douleur.

"Triste destin des rois! esclaves que nous sommes
"Et des rigueurs du sort et des discours des hommes,
"Nous nous voyons sans cesse assiégés de témoins—
"Et les plus malheureux osent pleurer le moins.'

"He then again said, after having been silent for a few
"moments, 'Surely this dear Sister is no more! What do
"you think, dear friend? Does she still live?' He cried
"bitterly! 'Speak to me friend; don't flatter me, she is
"surely dead!'

"Sir, I replied; this great misfortune may have taken "place, and I fear as they have written to your Majesty, "you must call all your philosophy, and all your firmness of "mind, which places you so far above other mortals, to your "aid. It requires more than fortitude to bear such losses. "The King replied, 'I have enough courage to repair all the "disasters of the 14th. Call my brother to me, and you will "see whether Dawn will gain any advantage from the blow "he has dealt us! But how can I make up for the loss "which everything warns me of; how can I replace this "beloved and adorable sister, who has loved me so dearly? "How could I believe that she to whom, since my earliest "youth, I have confided my every thought, should so soon "be taken from me? Must every misfortune overwhelm "me? I pity you, my friend, that you should be a continual "witness of events which, succeeding each other rapidly, "torment every moment of my life. What a sad existence I "oblige you to endure.' The King then sent me away, "begging me, however, not to go far away from head-"quarters, as he might send for me at any moment. . . . . .

"17*th October*, 1758.

"Having had much trouble in getting to sleep, "I at last slept soundly, till I was roused at 2 o'clock in the "morning by one of the King's footmen, begging me to "come to him as soon as ever I was dressed. I at once knew "what was the reason of this summons, and the servant "confirmed my suspicions.

"I found the King sobbing bitterly, and was for some "moments in his presence before he was able to speak to "me.

"At last he cried, 'my sister is lost to me for ever! "Dear friend, I shall never see her again! It is the most "terrible blow which could have fallen upon me. I have

"now lost mother, brother and sister, all that is most dear "to me. These losses have fallen one on the other.'*

"This is the account of the first moments after the defeat "and the sad news of the Margravine's death. I have "written it down faithfully for myself, as I was anxious to "have a clear idea of the workings of the heart and mind of "this extraordinary Prince."

Our task is now at an end, for with the death of the Margravine the correspondence closes. If these pages should have been able to show the better and nobler side of Voltaire's character, and by so doing, soften the severe criticism it generally meets with, then our object has been attained.

Both Wilhelmine and the poet possessed the sensitive excitability and the changeable character of their century, and it was for this reason that they shared the same fate in the judgment of posterity, of being held answerable chiefly for their shortcomings, without taking the times they lived in, and the difficulties with which they were surrounded into consideration.

* After the battle of Kolin, the King heard of his mother's death; whilst raising the siege of Olmütz, of that of his brother, the Prince of Prussia, and, lastly, of the Margravine's end two days after the surprise at Hochkirch.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

I.

LETTERS OF THE MARGRAVINE OF BAIREUTH TO VOLTAIRE.

À Bruxelles, *le* 26 *Septembre*, 1742.

O vous qui de Minerve avez suivi les traces,
Par quel effroyable revers
Aurais-je donc perdu plus de soixante vers
En l'honneur de vos bonnes grâces?
C'est ainsi quelquefois qu'un malheureux mortel,
L'esprit en oraison et les mains étendues,
Marmotte un froid cantique au pied du maître-autel;
Un diable vient boucher tous les chemins du ciel,
Et les prières sont perdues.

Votre Altesse Royale saura que voilà ma destinée auprès d'elle. Je reçus, il y a environ un an, un petit paquet fort joli de sa part avec une lettre du philosophe M. de Superville. Je partais pour Paris, precisément dans le moment que je reçus ce témoignage de ses bontés; je prends à témoin Apollon, les neuf Muses et la grande divinité de la reconnaissance, que je fis sur la route un nombre très considérable de mauvais vers, lesquels je joignis, en arrivant à Paris, à quatre pages de prose; je portai l'énorme paquet moi-même à la grande poste de Paris, et je le recommandai avec tant d'empressement, qu'on crut apparemment qu'il contenait de grands mystères. Les curieux furent confondus sans doute, mais, Madame, c'est moi qui le suis par ce qui me revient aujourd'hui. J'apprends que Votre Altesse Royale n'a reçu

ni prose ni vers, et qu'elle me croit avec raison un barbare, paresseux, sans aucune connaissance de ses premiers devoirs.

Rendez-moi justice, Madame, songez combien il est impossible d'oublier vos bontés, et croyez que non-seulement j'eus l'honneur d'écrire à Votre Altesse Royale, mais que je serais venu la remercier dans ses États si ma destinée m'avait permis de faire cet agréable voyage. Non, Madame, je n'oublierai jamais la princesse philosophe, la protectrice des arts, la musicienne parfaite, le modèle de la politesse et de l'affabilité. Le Roi, votre très-auguste et très-amusant frère, m'ordonna, il n'y a pas longtemps, de lui faire ma cour à Aix-la-Chapelle; je le vis, Madame, se portant comme un héros, se moquant des médecins et se baignant pour son plaisir; je ne trouvai rien de changé en lui que son visage, que j'avais vu, il y a deux ans, un peu effilé par la fièvre quarte, et qui est devenu d'une rondeur qui sied très-bien avec une couronne de lauriers; deux victoires de plus ne l'ont rendu ni moins humain, ni moins affable. Je ne cesserai, Madame, de regretter les jours où j'ai eu l'honneur de faire ma cour à Votre Altesse Royale et à Sa Majesté, dans la retraite de Rheinsberg; les bontés dont m'honora Monseigneur le Margrave me seront toujours présentes, et tout ce que je souhaite, c'est de pouvoir encore jouir au moins une fois en ma vie du même honneur.

Je suis, avec le plus profond respect, Madame, de Votre Altesse Royale, le très-humble et très-obéissant serviteur.

VOLTAIRE.

MADAME,

Que Votre Altesse Royale renonce à Madame de Graffigny; elle est vieille, elle est malade. Mais vous êtes malade et vieux, me dira Votre Altesse Royale; oui, Madame, mais j'ai les passions jeunes, et le Roi votre frère me rajeunit. En un mot, Madame de Graffigny ne veut point quitter Paris, et

moi je ne veux point quitter Frédéric le Grand. Chacun dans ce monde est gouverné par son goût. Je vous déterrerai quelque complaisante, ni jeune ni vieille, point tracassière, femme d'esprit, femme honnête, femme de condition, et vous aurez cela pour vos étrennes, aussi bien qu'un certain petit fou nommé Heurtand que M. de Montperni a retenu. Il fait pleurer dans la tragédie et pouffer de rire dans le comique. Point de "Rome Sauvée" aujourd'hui, il faut que vous jouissiez du Roi tout à votre aise. Cicéron a d'ailleurs ses coliques infernales qui l'empêchent de vous faire sa cour et de briller en brodequins aujourd'hui.

Je me mets aux pieds de Votre Altesse Royale.

VOLTAIRE.

À POTSDAM, *ce* 9 *Décembre*, 1750.

MADAME,

Les grandes passions mènent bien loin et j'aurais eu l'honneur de suivre à Baireuth la digne sœur d'un héros, si l'avantage de vivre auprès de ce héros ne m'avait retenu encore à ses pieds. Votre Altesse Royale sait que je devais partir pour la France le 15 Décembre, mais peut-on avoir d'autre patrie que celle de Frédéric le Grand? On n'y a qu'un seul chagrin, c'est de n'y plus voir Votre Altesse Royale. On est consolé au moins par les nouvelles qu'on a de votre santé. On dit qu'elle se raffermit et que vous avez très-bien soutenu les fatigues du voyage. Si Votre Altesse Royale peut parvenir à avoir un corps digne de son âme et une santé égale à sa beauté, qu'aurez-vous à désirer dans le monde? Peut-être, Madame, sentez-vous le besoin de faire de nouveaux heureux, en approchant encore de votre personne quelques gens de bonne compagnie, dignes de vous voir et de vous entendre.

Ne pouvant aller si tôt à Paris, j'ai chargé ma nièce de chercher une dame de condition, veuve, qui ait de l'esprit,

des lettres et de la conversation. Peut-être que l'envie d'obéir à vos ordres lui fera trouver ce qu'il faut à Votre Altesse Royale. Du moins je vous réponds, Madame, qu'elle y fera tous ses efforts et que Votre Altesse Royale pourra accepter de sa main la personne qu'elle présentera. Je persiste à penser que le Marquis d'Adhémar, déjà connu à votre cour, serait un homme bien convenable. Je réponds hardiment de sa sagesse, de son esprit et de sa valeur. Je ne crois pas que Monseigneur le Margrave puisse jamais faire un meilleur choix ; j'attendrai sur cela vos ordres. Je suis plus sûr de la bonne acquisition que ferait votre cour, que je ne le suis des dispositions présentes du Marquis d'Adhémar, mais ayant eu le bonheur d'approcher de Votre Altesse Royale, peut-on douter qu'il ne veuille se fixer à son service ? Privé, comme je le suis, du bonheur de passer ma vie à vos pieds, et à ceux de Monseigneur le Margrave, je serais heureux d'y savoir mon ami.

Vous savez sans doute, Madame, que le Roi a ordonné à d'Arnaud de partir dans les vingt-quatre heures ; il est à Dresde, où il se vante des bonnes fortunes de la cour de Berlin.

Je suis avec le plus profond respect, de Votre Altesse Royale,

Le très-humble et très-soumis serviteur,

VOLTAIRE.

le 10 *Décembre.*

JE vous ai promis, Monsieur, de vous écrire, et je vous tiens parole. J'espère que notre correspondance ne sera pas aussi maigre que nos deux individus, et que vous me donnerez souvent sujet de vous répondre. Je ne vous parlerai point de mes regrets ; ce serait les renouveler. Je suis sans cesse transportée dans votre abbaye, et vous jugez bien que celui qui en est abbé m'occupe toujours. Je me

suis acquittée de vos commissions auprès du Margrave. Il me charge de vous assurer de son amitié et vous prie de mettre à fin l'affaire du Marquis d'Adhémar. Il sera charmé de le prendre à son service comme chambellan, et lui fera des conditions dont il pourra être content. Quoique votre recommandation suffise auprès du Margrave, il serait pourtant nécessaire pour l'agrément du Marquis, d'en avoir une ou de Mon. de Puisieulx ou de M. d'Argenson qu'il pût produire à la cour. Je vous serai bien obligée si vous pouvez le déterminer à venir bientôt ici, où nous avons grand besoin de secours pour remplir les vides de la conversation. Nos entretiens me semblent comme la musique chinoise, où il y a de longues pauses qui finissent par des tons discordants. Je crains que ma lettre ne s'en ressente ; tant mieux pour vous, Monsieur ; il faut des moments d'ennui dans la vie pour faire valoir d'autant plus ceux qui font plaisir. Après la lecture de cette lettre, les petits soupers vous paraîtront bien plus agréables. Pensez-y quelquefois à moi, je vous en prie, et soyez persuadé de ma parfaite estime.

WILHELMINE.

Décembre, 1750.

MADAME,

Votre Altesse Royale a grandement raison ; il faut avoir du bon temps. Les princes et les moines n'ont que leur vie en ce monde. Ce ne sont pas des régiments qui rendent heureux, c'est de passer doucement les vingt-quatre heures du jour, et cela est plus difficile qu'on ne pense. Le grand Turc s'ennuie à Constantinople ; c'est pourtant une belle ville. La situation de Baireuth n'est pas si riante, mais l'esprit et les grâces embellissent tout. Eh bien, Madame, puisqu'il faut dire les gros mots, que ferez-vous avec votre esprit et vos grâces si Votre Altesse Royale n'a pas une demi-douzaine de gens de mérite pour sentir le vôtre ? C'est

une idée bien raisonnable de mettre quelques voix de plus dans votre concert. J'ai écrit encore deux fois au Marquis d'Adhémar; point de réponse encore; il faut qu'il soit enchanté chez quelque Armide. J'écris une lettre fulminante à ma nièce; il faut qu'elle use de son autorité et qu'elle désenchante Adhémar pour l'envoyer plus enchanté à vos pieds. Mais, Madame, il faudrait deux Adhémar, deux Graffigny, des recrues de plaisir.

Je jure par mon sincère attachement à Vos Altesses Royales que si j'avais pu aller à Paris, je vous aurais amené des recrues, non pas des blancs-becs, non pas de sots faiseurs de vers ampoulés, mais des gens dignes de vous faire leur cour. Ah! Madame, il me passe quelquefois des romans par la tête. Je me dis: Si pendant les mois de Novembre, de Décembre et de Janvier, où le Roi a assez de monde, on pouvait aller rendre ses respects à sa divine sœur! Si pendant que j'y viendrais de l'Orient, ma nièce y venait de l'Occident! Et puis des opéras, des tragédies nouvelles; cela ne vaudrait-il pas mieux que d'aller en Italie? Madame, je vous préférerais à Saint-Pierre de Rome, à la ville souterraine, au pape. Cela est-il impossible? Je n'en sais rien. Je vis au jour la journée, je travaille au "Siècle de Louis XIV." soir et matin, je fais un grand tableau de la révolution de l'esprit humain dans ce siècle où l'on a commencé à penser depuis les Alpes jusqu'aux Krapaths. Cela pourra amuser le loisir de Votre Altesse Royale. Mais je veux chasser de ma tête mon roman de Baireuth, car rêver qu'on a un trésor, et se réveiller les mains vides, cela est trop triste.

J'écris tout cela au son du tambour et des trompettes et de mille coups de fusil qui assourdissent mes pacifiques oreilles; cela est bon pour Frédéric le Grand. Il lui faut des armées le matin, et Apollon l'après-midi. Il a tout: il carre des bataillons et des périodes. Du reste, chaque frère est dans sa cellule paisiblement; M. de Rothembourg est toujours malade, Maupertuis aussi, frère Pölnitz un peu triste, moi

toujours malingre, toujours travaillant, toujours plein de l'envie de faire ma cour à Vos Altesses Royales.

Serait-il permis, sauf le respect, de ne pas oublier M. de Montperni? Le papier manque. Point de place pour les très-profonds respects. Qu'importe?

VOLTAIRE.

À BERLIN, 19 *Décembre*, 1750.

MADAME,

Les ordres de Votre Altesse Royale ont croisé mes hommages, et je me mettais à ses pieds quand elle daignait m'écrire. J'ai souhaité pour M. le Marquis d'Adhémar et Spada, j'ose dire aussi pour Vos Altesses Royales, qu'il fût à votre cour. Permettez-moi, Madame, d'avoir l'honneur de vous dire qu'il est bien difficile de lui proposer de porter en poche des lettres de recommandation. Ce serait de lui que des hommes peu connus en prendraient pour être présentés. Il est fils du grand maréchal du Roi Stanislas, et il n'a tenu qu'à lui d'être chambellan de cette cour avec tous les agréments que sa naissance et son mérite peuvent procurer. Le goût de la guerre l'en a empêché. C'est un des meilleurs officiers qu'ait le Roi de France; il était capitaine de cavalerie, on lui avait promis un régiment, on ne lui a pas tenu parole. Il devait être envoyé comme ministre du Roi à Bruxelles, on lui a manqué encore. Voilà sa situation. J'ai imaginé que le chagrin d'être inutile et l'idée qu'il a de Votre Altesse Royale pourraient le déterminer à s'associer à votre cour. Je demande d'abord en grâce à Votre Altesse Royale de souffrir que je n'en parle à M. d'Adhémar que quand elle sera instruite de son mérite; il sera aisé de charger le ministre du Roi de s'en informer à Paris. Madame peut encore faire charger M. d'Ammon, chambellan du Roi, qui va en France pour un traité de commerce, de lui rendre compte de M. d'Adhémar, et d'en parler aux ministres sans laisser soupçonner que M. d'Adhémar veuille quitter la France.

On verrait bien que j'ai part à cet enlèvement, et on ajouterait, aux reproches qu'on m'a faits de quitter mon pays, celui d'engager encore des déserteurs.

Daignez surtout vous souvenir, Madame, que je n'ai point promis le Marquis d'Adhémar, que j'ai dit à Votre Altesse Royale que je ferais l'impossible pour l'acquérir. Je persiste toujours dans ce dessein de vous prouver mon zèle, parce que je sais que M. d'Adhémar est capable d'un attachement solide et que ce n'est point un homme à quitter une cour charmante pour aller à Monaco. J'attendrai sur cela les ordres de Vos Altesses Royales. Je resterai encore près de trois mois dans cette abbaye où l'on vous regrette tous les jours. Je suis toujours moine, à Berlin comme à Potsdam, ne connaissant que ma cellule et le révérend père abbé auprès de qui je veux vivre et mourir, et qui seul me console de ne pas passer mes jours auprès de Votre Altesse Royale. Votre abbaye et la sienne sont les seules où une âme comme la mienne puisse faire son salut. J'ai vu l'office de sainte Sémiramis mis en vers ou à peu près par frère Cori, chapelain de l'Opéra. On trouve pourtant dans la poésie de frère Cori des étincelles du feu divin qui anime l'auguste Wilhelmine. On eut hier ici "Phaéton," et pour mieux représenter l'embrasement qu'avait jadis causé ce téméraire, le feu prit aux décorations. Le roi était un peu indisposé et ne vit point l'opéra. La petite troupe de Monseigneur le prince Henri va jouer "Zaïre," mais tandis qu'on se réjouit, la mortalité emporte les bestiaux, les chevaux ont la peste en Angleterre, et les hommes en Pologne, sur les frontières de la Valachie.

Vivez heureuse, Madame ; ayez soin d'une santé si précieuse, daignez me conserver vos bontés et celles de Monseigneur le Margrave. J'ai exécuté vos ordres. Je renouvelle à Vos Altesses Royales mes profonds respects.

Frère Voltaire.

25 *Décembre*, 1750.

Sœur Guillemette à frère Voltaire, salut; car je me compte parmi les heureux habitants de votre abbaye, quoique je n'y sois plus: et je compte très-fort si Dieu me donne bonne vie et longue, d'y aller reprendre ma place un jour. J'ai reçu votre consolante épître. Je vous jure mon grand juron, Monsieur, qu'elle m'a infiniment plus édifiée que celle de Saint Paul à la dame élue. Celle-ci me causait un certain assoupissement qui valait l'opium, et m'empêchait d'en apercevoir les beautés. La vôtre a fait un effet contraire; elle m'a tirée de ma léthargie, et a remis en mouvement mes esprits vitaux.

Quoique vous ayez remis votre voyage de Paris, j'espère que vous me tiendrez parole, et que vous viendrez me voir ici. Apollon vint jadis se familiariser avec les mortels, et ne dédaigna pas de se faire pasteur pour les instruire. Faites-en de même, Monsieur; vous ne pouvez suivre de meilleur modèle.

Que dites-vous de l'arrivée du Messie à Dresde? Pourrez-vous après cela révoquer en doute les miracles? Si j'avais été le Prince Royal de Saxe, j'en aurais laissé tout l'honneur au Saint-Esprit; mais il pense comme Charles VI. Lorsque l'Impératrice accoucha de l'Archiduc, on cria que c'était à Népomucène qu'on devait l'obligation: "à Dieu ne plaise" dit l'Empereur, "je serais donc cocu."

Mais laissons là le Saint-Esprit et le Messie. Quoiqu'il fût né aujourd'hui, je vous assure que je n'aurais pas pensé à lui, sans l'aventure merveilleuse de Saxe. J'aime mieux penser aux beaux-esprits de Potsdam, à son abbé et à ses moines. Ressouvenez-vous quelquefois en revanche des absents; et comptez toujours sur moi comme sur une véritable amie.

WILHELMINE.

le 6 de Janvier, 1752.

Je profite d'un moment qui me reste pour vous avertir, Monsieur, que le Duc de Wirtemberg a dessein d'engager le Marquis d'Adhémar dans son service. Il a fait connaissance avec lui à Paris, et j'ai appris par un cavalier de la suite du Duc, que le Marquis d'Adhémar se proposait de venir ici. Je vous prie de le prévenir, et de l'engager à se rendre bientôt en cette cour. Je vous souhaite dans le cours de cette année une santé parfaite. C'est la seule chose qui vous manque pour vous rendre heureux. Nous histrionons ici comme vous le faites à Berlin. Adieu, il faut que je vous quitte pour repasser mon rôle. Soyez persuadé de ma parfaite estime.

WILHELMINE.

À BERLIN, *le 6 Janvier*, 1751.

MADAME,

Frère Voltaire n'a fait que changer de cellule. Il est à Berlin comme à Potsdam, très-retiré et très-pensant à Votre Altesse Royale. Il vous promet, Madame, foi de moine, de venir vous demander votre bénédiction dans votre abbaye souveraine, à son retour de cette grande ville de Paris, où il faut bien enfin qu'il aille mettre ordre à ses affaires temporelles, qu'il a trop longtemps négligées pour les affaires spirituelles du révérend père abbé. Mais je suis fort étonné que Votre Révérence n'ait pas reçu deux lettres de moi, indigne, au lieu d'une. J'ai eu certainement l'honneur de vous écrire deux fois du prieuré de Potsdam. Il faut apparemment que la bénédiction du ciel ne favorise pas le commerce des moines aussi relâchés que nous le sommes. Votre Révérence fait de très-salutaires réflexions sur le dernier miracle. Elle sait combien les miracles sont quelquefois nécessaires. Il nous fallut autrefois en France une pucelle. Il a fallu souvent ailleurs tout le contraire. " O Signore, Signore, figliuoli in ogni modo ! " L'amour était le

Saint-Esprit de l'antiquité. C'était lui qui se mêlait de ces affaires-là. Aujourd'hui ce sont des moines et des saints. Notre mythologie fait pitié ; il n'y a rien de si plat que ce qu'on appelle la catholicité.

Venons, Madame, aux ordres que Votre Altesse Royale me donne pour le Marquis d'Adhémar. Je lui ai écrit et j'aurai l'honneur de vous rendre compte de sa réponse. Je suis persuadé qu'il sera bien sensible au bonheur d'être admis dans votre cour. Il a une âme digne de la vôtre, et j'ose dire qu'il est fait pour Monseigneur le Margrave et pour vous. M. de Montperni trouvera en lui une société bien agréable. Il a d'ailleurs beaucoup de goût, il fait joliment des vers, et, par-dessus tout cela, c'est le plus honnête homme du monde comme le plus brave. Il est triste d'être obligé de parler à un homme de ce caractère, de cette guenille qu'on nomme appointements et argent, et c'est salir le papier que de fatiguer Votre Altesse Royale de ces misères que sœur Guillemette méprise si fort ; mais ces guenilles étant absolument nécessaires dans ce monde-ci, et les rois comme les charbonniers ne pouvant rien faire du tout sans argent, j'en ai parlé dans ma lettre au Marquis d'Adhémar. Je crois que Votre Altesse Royale ne me désavouera pas ; j'ai donc écrit que quinze cents écus seraient à peu près ce qu'il faudrait. Il me semble que les appointements de M. de Montperni ne montent pas au-delà et qu'il ne faut pas donner lieu à la jalousie, même entre des personnes qui ne peuvent être jalouses. J'ai ménagé votre bourse et j'ai fait violence à votre générosité en proposant quinze cents écus. Il n'y aura que vous, Madame, et Monseigneur le Margrave qui pouvez me gronder d'avoir offert peu, mais mon ami M. d'Adhémar ne m'en grondera pas. En un mot, il ne peut jamais vivre dans une cour plus généreuse, et cette cour ne peut faire une plus noble acquisition. Je voudrais qu'il pût partir avec ma nièce et moi, mais, ô adorable abbesse, si nous étions tous trois dans votre couvent, nous n'en voudrions jamais sortir. Le daignez

faire de lui. Tous les autres frères baisent le bas de votre sacrée robe.

Je ne sais si M. de Montperni a reçu des nouvelles d'un petit fou de comédien que je lui avais procuré pour recruter votre troupe. Je voudrais savoir comment il faut s'y prendre pour faire souvenir ici de moi M. de Montperni ; on ne peut prendre de ces libertés-là en écrivant à Votre Altesse Royale. Je me mets aux pieds de Votre Altesse Royale, de Monseigneur. Nous jouâmes hier "Zaïre," Monseigneur le Prince Henri se surpasse, Monseigneur le Prince Royal prononça très-distinctement. Monseigneur le Prince Ferdinand adoucit sa voix, Madame la Princesse Amélie eut de la tendresse, et la reine-mère fut enchantée. Mais Baireuth, Baireuth, quand serai-je assez heureux pour voir vos fêtes et surtout pour admirer, pour révérer, pour oser chérir de plus près cette auguste princesse, à qui je présente mes très-profonds respects de trop loin !

VOLTAIRE.

le 23 *Janvier*, 1751.

Il faut que je me sois très-mal expliquée dans ma dernière lettre, puisque vous n'en avez pas compris le sens. Peut-être étais-je dans ce moment-là inspirée du Saint-Esprit. Comme vous n'êtes pas apôtre, vous avez trouvé fort obscur ce que je croyais fort clair. J'en viens à l'explication. Le Duc de Wirtemberg m'a marqué qu'il avait dessein d'engager le Marquis d'Adhémar à son service. J'ai craint qu'il ne vous prévint, et vous ai prié de faire en sorte que le Marquis refuse les propositions qu'on lui fera de la part du Duc. Le Margrave ne vous démentira point par rapport aux quinze cents écus d'appointements que vous lui avez offerts. Je vous prie de dépêcher cette affaire, et d'engager M. d'Adhémar à se rendre bientôt ici. On lui destine une charge de cour au-dessus de celle de Chambellan, et

vous pouvez compter que le Margrave aura pour lui toutes les attentions imaginables.

Je crois que votre séjour en Allemagne inspire dans tous les cœurs la fureur de réciter des vers. La cour de Wirtemberg revient exprès ici pour histrioner avec nous. Le sensé Vriot nous a choisi, selon moi, la plus détestable pièce de théâtre qu'il y ait pour la versification: c'est "Orèste et Pilades" de La Motte. J'admire les différentes façons de penser qu'il y a dans le monde. Vous excluez les femmes de vos tragédies de Potsdam, et nous voudrions, si nous avions un Voltaire, retrancher les hommes de celles que nous jouons ici. N'y aurait-il pas moyen que vous puissiez nous accommoder une de vos pièces, et y donner les deux principaux rôles aux femmes? Le Duc et ma fille jouent fort joliment; mais c'est tout. Le pauvre Montperni est encore trop languissant pour prendre un grand rôle, et le reste ne fait qu'estropier vos pièces. Je n'ai osé proposer "Sémiramis"; la Duchesse mère ayant représenté cette pièce à Stutgard.

J'ai vu ces jours passés un personnage singulier. C'est un référendaire du Pape; prélat, Chanoine de Sainte-Marie, et malgré tout cela homme sensé, déchaîné contre les moines, à l'abri du préjugé, et ne parlant que de tolérance.

Votre petit acteur est arrivé. Comme j'ai été tout ce temps incommodée, je ne l'ai point encore vu; mais on m'en dit beaucoup de bien.

Venez bientôt nous voir dans notre couvent; c'est tout ce que nous souhaitons. Le Margrave vous fait bien des amitiés. Saluez tous les frères qui se souviennent encore de moi, et soyez persuadé que l'Abbesse de Baireuth ne désire rien tant que de pouvoir convaincre frère Voltaire de sa parfaite estime.

WILHELMINE.

30 *Janvier*, 1751.

MADAME,

Votre Altesse Royale a plus de rivaux qu'elle ne pense, mais je crois que le Marquis d'Adhémar vous donnera la préférence. Je lui écris encore fortement. Tout mon désir est de pouvoir être à vos pieds au printemps. Mais quel est l'homme qui soit le maître de sa destinée? Frère Voltaire est ici en pénitence, il a un chien de procès avec un juif, et selon la loi de l'Ancien Testament, il lui en coûtera encore pour avoir été volé, et, par-dessus le marché, il en résulte une très-belle tracasserie, laquelle, subdivisée en quatre ou cinq petites, pourrait former un sujet de comédie aussi plaisant que le manifeste de la Czarine, qui prend l'Europe à témoin que M. Grass n'a pas été prié à souper. Cela amuserait Votre Altesse Royale sur votre théâtre de Baireuth. Monseigneur le Prince Henri joua hier "Sidney" pour la clôture du carnaval. Il me semble que c'est mettre un habit de deuil un jour de gala. Voilà un étrange sujet de comédie pour un prince de dix-neuf ans. J'aimerais autant voir un enterrement que cette pièce. Mais Monseigneur le Prince Henri met tant de grâce dans tout ce qu'il récite et dans tout ce qu'il fait, qu'il ma sauvé entièrement le dégoût et la tristesse de cet ouvrage.

Madame, quand nous jouons à Potsdam sans femmes, je vous jure que c'est bien à notre corps défendant. Les moines demandent à Dieu des femmes, mais croyez-moi, ne cherchez point dans Baireuth à vous passer d'hommes. Le théâtre est la peinture de la vie humaine, et dans cette vie il faut que les hommes et les femmes soient ensemble; sans quoi, on ne vit guère qu'à demi. Songez, Madame, à votre santé, voilà le point essentiel. Si le mérite en donnait, vous vous porteriez mieux que toutes les princesses de ce monde, mais malheureusement le mérite le plus solide se trouve chez vous dans le corps le plus faible. Vous êtes condamnée au régime tandis que la Métrie se donne par jour deux indiges-

tions et ne s'en porte que mieux. Votre Altesse Royale et le Roi votre frère sont, je crois, les princes de la terre les mieux partagés en esprit et le plus mal en estomacs. Il faut que tout soit compensé. Pour moi chétif, je compte traîner ici encore un mois ou six semaines, et aller ensuite arranger mes petites affaires à Paris. Je ne crois pas qu'on puisse aller à Paris par d'autres chemins que par Baireuth, et mon cœur qui me conduit seul, dit qu'il faut que je prenne cette route. Je me mets aux pieds de Votre Altesse Royale et je lui présente mes très-profonds respects aussi bien qu'à Monseigneur.

VOLTAIRE.

le 18 *Février*, 1751.

Si vous désirez grandement me revoir, je vous rends le réciproque ; partout frère Voltaire sera le bienvenu, en quelque temps que ce soit : et nous tâcherons de lui rendre notre abbaye agréable, autant que faire sera possible. Ne vous émerveillez pas de mon langage de jadis. Il était naïf ; et qui dit naïf dit sincère. Bref, je lis les Mémoires de Sully, et j'ai parcouru tous ceux que j'ai sur l'Histoire de France. Ces mémoires secrets mettent infiniment mieux au fait que les histoires générales, où les auteurs attribuent souvent les belles actions, tant politiques que militaires, à ceux qui n'y ont eu que peu de part. J'ai conclu que vous avez eu de très-grands hommes, et des Rois très ordinaires. Henri IV. n'aurait peut-être jamais régné, ou ne se serait pas maintenu, sans un Sully ; et Louis XIV. sans les Louvois, les Colbert et les Turenne, n'aurait jamais acquis le surnom de Grand. Tel est le monde : on sacrifie à la grandeur et rarement au mérite.

Vous me mandez des choses bien extraordinaires. Apollon est en procès avec un juif ? Fi donc, Monsieur, cela est abominable. J'ai cherché dans toute la mythologie, et n'ai trouvé ombre de plaidoyer dans ce goût au Parnasse.

Quelque comique qu'il soit, je ne veux point le voir représenter sur la scène. Les grands hommes n'y doivent paraître que dans leur lustre. Je veux vous y contempler juge de l'esprit, des talents et des sciences, triomphant des Racine et des Corneille, et dictateur perpétuel de la république des belles-lettres. J'espère que votre Israélite aura porté la peine de sa fourberie, et que vous aurez l'esprit tranquille.

Envoyez-nous bientôt le Marquis d'Adhémar; songez à la joie, renoncez à la repentance; portez-vous bien; pensez quelquefois à moi, et comptez sur ma parfaite estime.

WILHELMINE.

1*er Mars*, 1751.

MADAME,

Frère Voltaire reçut avant-hier la bénédiction de Votre Révérence Royale. Le style du bon vieux temps vous sied aussi bien que celui d'aujourd'hui, vous avez la délicatesse de l'un et la naïveté de l'autre. Si le Duc de Sully avait prévu que ses paperasses économiques, royales et politiques, seraient lues un jour par Madame la Margrave de Baireuth, il aurait redoublé de vanité.

Je crois, Madame, que Votre Altesse Royale est la première personne qui ait mis le Duc de Sully au-dessus de Henri Quatre. Pour moi, homme très-faible, j'avoue que j'aime mieux les faiblesses de ce bon Roi que toutes les vertus austères de son ministre. Je crois même qu'en fait de gouvernement, Henri le Grand en savait encore plus que le Duc de Sully. Nous ne devons plusieurs manufactures et surtout l'établissement des vers à soie qu'à la constance éclairée de ce digne roi qui l'emporta sur la résistance opiniâtre et aveugle de son ministre.

Au reste, le Duc de Sully eut souvent des procès contre les Juifs qui fournissaient les armées; ainsi, il faut me par-

donner d'en avoir pu gagner un contre un scélérat de l'Ancien Testament, que j'ai traité encore avec trop de générosité après l'avoir fait condamner. Cette affaire m'a fait une peine horrible, parce que, comme dit Votre Altesse Royale, les gens de lettres ne semblent être en ce monde que pour écrire, et qu'ils ne doivent pas acheter des diamants.

M. d'Adhémar me fait espérer tous les jours qu'il sera assez heureux pour venir auprès de Votre Altesse Royale. Si j'étais à sa place, il y a longtemps que je serais parti. J'espère que le chambellan d'Ammon, qui loge chez moi à Paris et qui soupe tous les jours avec le Marquis d'Adhémar, ne me traversera pas dans ma négociation. Pour la dame qu'il vous faut, il n'y a pas d'apparence que j'en donne sitôt une à Votre Altesse Royale ; la raison en est que de deux choses l'une, ou je mourrai ici de la poitrine, ou j'irai en Italie avant de revoir Paris ; mais, Madame, soyez très-sûre que mon cœur préférera en secret le séjour de Baireuth à Saint-Pierre de Rome et à la place Saint-Marc. Les bénédictions du pape et les pantalonnades vénitiennes ne valent pas assurément l'honneur de vous approcher et le plaisir de vous entendre. Je me mets aux pieds de Monseigneur le Margrave et je renouvelle à Vos Altesses Royales les très-profonds respects et le sincère attachement du pauvre malade frère Voltaire.

Vos bontés pour M. de Montperni dont il est si digne semblent me mettre en droit de faire ici des vœux pour sa santé ; un bon moine doit prier pour tous les frères.

VOLTAIRE.

À POTSDAM,
8 *Mai*, 1751.

MADAME,

Votre Altesse Royale attendait des Adhémars, et elle a des Cothenius. Au lieu des plaisirs qui devraient être en foule autour d'elle, faudra-t-il qu'elle n'ait que des juleps

et des pilules? Faudra-t-il toujours craindre pour une santé si précieuse? Si le vif intérêt que tout le monde prend ici à cette santé pouvait être de quelque secours à Votre Altesse Royale, vous seriez bientôt guérie. Le couvent de Potsdam redouble pour vous, Madame, ses dévotes prières; et moi, frère indigne de ce monastère, je ne suis pas celui dont les vœux sont les moins fervents. Votre Altesse Royale sait quels sentiments je lui ai voués, elle connaît l'empire qu'elle a sur les cœurs. Je suis également attaché à la sœur et au frère. Je voudrais chanter mes matines à Potsdam et mes vêpres à Baireuth.

Si j'étais sûr, Madame, que cette lettre vous parvînt dans un temps où votre santé serait meilleure, je vous parlerais du Marquis d'Adhémar qui n'a pas encore pu se résoudre à quitter Paris; je vous parlerais d'un gentilhomme lorrain nommé Liébaud, qui est officier, qui est homme de lettres, sage, instruit, et dont on répond. Mais je ne peux parler que de la santé de Votre Altesse Royale, de nos inquiétudes et de notre douleur. Que ne puis-je accompagner M. Cothenius! que ne puis-je venir me mettre à vos pieds et à ceux de Monseigneur! Le Roi va à Clèves; je reste à griffonner dans ma cellule; les maladies qui m'accablent me rendent sédentaire, mais, Madame, j'oublie mes maux pour ne songer qu'aux vôtres; je suis indigné contre la nature de ce que je ne suis pas le seul qui souffre. Pourquoi faut-il qu'une âme aussi ferme que la vôtre soit logée dans un corps si délicat! Nous avons dix mille grands garçons qui ne pensent point et qui tirent actuellement dix mille coups de fusil aux portes de Potsdam. Ils se portent à merveille et Madame la Margrave de Baireuth souffre! Et la Providence! Où est-elle donc? Je ne serai pas son serviteur si vous n'avez de la santé, et je veux chanter un Te Deum au retour de Cothenius.

Frère Voltaire.

Berlin,
28 *Mars*, 1751.

Madame,

Frère malingre, frère hibou, frère griffonneur est plus que jamais aux pieds de Votre Altesse Royale ; s'il lui écrivait aussi souvent qu'il pense à elle, Son Altesse Royale aurait des lettres de lui cinq ou six fois par jour.

J'attends, Madame, l'heureux temps où j'aurai assez de santé pour faire le voyage de Baireuth ; il me semble que j'ai renoncé à celui de France et d'Italie, mais je me berce toujours de l'espérance de vous faire ma cour. Il fallait autrefois que les virtuoses allassent à Naples, à Florence, à Ferrare ; c'est maintenant à Baireuth qu'il faut aller.

Si Votre Altesse Royale a envie de faire représenter un nouvel opéra chez elle, qu'elle ne prenne pas " Orphée " que le Roi son frère vient de faire jouer. Jamais je n'ai vu un si sot Pluton et un Orphée si ennuyeux. Il y a toujours de beaux morceaux dans la musique de Graun, mais cette fois-ci le poëte l'avait subjugué. Le Roi, qui s'y connaît bien, avait heureusement fait beaucoup de retranchements. Je disais à un vieux militaire qui bâillait à côté de moi et qui n'entendait pas un mot d'italien, " En vérité, le Roi est le meilleur prince de la terre, il a plus que jamais pitié de son peuple. Comment donc ? dit-il. Oui, ajoutai-je, il a accourci cet opéra-ci de moitié ! " Je me flatte que Votre Altesse Royale aura eu cet hiver de belles fêtes et de la santé. Mais, Madame, songez à la santé surtout. C'est là ce qu'il faut vous souhaiter ; la beauté, la grandeur, l'esprit, le don de plaire, tout est perdu quand on digère mal. C'est l'estomac qui fait les heureux.

Vraiment, Madame, je sais plus de nouvelles de la Pucelle que Votre Altesse Royale ne croit. Il est vrai que Madame la Duchesse de Wirtemberg passa une nuit chez vous à en transcrire quelques lambeaux. Mais ce qu'on a à Vienne des dépouilles de cette Pucelle vient de la bataille de Sore ; les

houzards, qui s'amusèrent à piller les bagages du Roi pendant qu'il battait les troupes réglées d'Autriche, volèrent le "Siècle de Louis XIV." et ce que le Roi avait de la Pucelle; cela consiste en sept ou huit cents vers détachés du corps de l'ouvrage. Ainsi Jeanne a été un peu houspillée, mais elle n'a pas tout à fait perdu son pucelage. Cette Jeanne était destinée à être toujours prise à la guerre.

J'en fis deux nouveaux chants il y a quelques mois; j'y fourrai un gros Tirconel, mais mon Tirconel ne l'a pas porté loin.

Pardon, Madame, il ne me reste point de place pour présenter à Vos Altesses Royales les profonds respects de

FRÈRE VOLTAIRE.

POTSDAM,
10 *Avril*, 1752.

MADAME,

Je n'avais point eu de nouvelles depuis un an du Marquis d'Adhémar, qui avait tant d'envie de s'attacher à Votre Altesse Royale, et que vous paraissiez désireux d'avoir dans votre maison. Il n'avait pu jusqu'à présent surmonter les difficultés que lui faisait son père, qui est, comme le sait probablement Votre Altesse Royale, grand maréchal du Roi Stanislas à Lunéville. Enfin, il me mande qu'il a levé les obstacles qu'on lui opposait et qu'il est prêt à venir se mettre aux pieds de Votre Altesse Royale; j'ignore si vous êtes toujours, Madame, dans les mêmes sentiments. Comme toutes les charges de votre maison sont remplies, il demanderait un titre de chevalier d'honneur; c'est une charge que je ne crois guère connue qu'en France et qui répond à celle de premier ou grand écuyer; mais ce n'est qu'un simple titre et il ne s'agit seulement que de n'avoir pas l'air d'être un homme inutile. Je me souviens que Votre Altesse Royale avait compté lui donner quinze cents écus d'appointements. Voilà l'état où est cette petite affaire. J'ai répondu au Mar-

quis d'Adhémar que j'attendais vos ordres, et je n'ai engagé Votre Altesse Royale en rien. Je lui ferai part, Madame, de vos dernières résolutions et des commandements dont il vous plaira de m'honorer. Tout ce que je sais, c'est que je voudrais bien grossir quelque temps avec lui le nombre de vos courtisans ; mais frère Voltaire ne sait encore quand il mettra le nez hors de sa cellule. Il est le meilleur moine du monde, et s'accoutume trop à la vie solitaire. Je pourrai bien, après le mariage de Monseigneur le Prince Henri, prendre mon essor et venir vous faire ma cour. Mais je ne réponds de rien et me résigne entièrement à la Providence. Je me flatte que votre santé, Madame, n'éprouve plus de ces orages qui nous ont tant alarmés et qu'ainsi aucune amertume ne se mêle à la douceur de votre vie.

Permettez-moi de renouveler pour jamais à Votre Altesse Royale et à Monseigneur le Margrave mes plus profonds respects et mon inviolable attachement. Si j'osais, je mettrais ici quelque chose pour M. de Montperni. Mais comment prendre la liberté ?

VOLTAIRE.

le 20 *Avril*, 1752.

La pénitence que vous vous imposez a achevé de fléchir mon courroux. Je n'avais pu encore oublier votre indifférence. Il ne fallait pas moins qu'un pèlerinage à Notre-Dame de Baireuth pour effacer votre péché. Frère Voltaire sera pardonné à ce prix. Il sera le bienvenu ici, et y trouvera des amis empressés à l'obliger et à lui témoigner leur estime. Je doute encore de l'accomplissement de vos promesses. Le climat d'Allemagne a-t-il pu en si peu de temps réformer la légèreté française ? Le voyage de France et d'Italie réduits en châteaux en Espagne, me font craindre le même sort pour celui-ci. Soyez donc archi-germain dans vos résolutions, et procurez-moi bientôt le plaisir de vous revoir.

Quoiqu'absent vous avez eu la faculté de m'arracher des larmes. J'ai vu hier représenter votre faux prophète. Les acteurs se sont surpassés, et vous avez eu la gloire d'émouvoir nos cœurs franconiens, qui d'ailleurs ressemblent assez aux rochers qu'ils habitent.

Le Marquis d'Adhémar a fait écrire il y a quatre semaines à M. de Folard. J'ai oublié de vous le mander dans ma dernière lettre. Vous jugez bien que ses offres ont été reçues avec plaisir. Montperni lui a écrit en conséquence. J'espère qu'il sera content des conditions. Elles sont plus avantageuses que celles qu'il avait désirées. Elles consistent en 4,000 Livres, la table, et l'entretien de ses équipages. Je vous prie d'achever votre ouvrage, et de faire en sorte qu'il soit bientôt fini. Je vous en aurai une grande obligation. Vous savez que le titre qu'il demande n'est point usité en Allemagne. Comme il répond à celui de Chambellan il aura ce titre auprès de moi.

Le temps m'empêche de vous dire davantage aujourd'hui. Soyez persuadé que je serai toujours votre amie.

WILHELMINE.

Fin Mai, 1752.

MADAME,

Je n'ai point encore reçu de réponse du Marquis d'Adhémar. Je lui écrivis le jour même que j'eus reçu les ordres dont Votre Altesse Royale m'honora. Il se peut faire qu'il se soit adressé à M. le chevalier de Follard, ou qu'il ait eu l'honneur d'écrire à Votre Altesse Royale. Peut-être a-t-il déjà le bonheur d'être auprès d'elle sans que j'en sois instruit dans la profonde et heureuse solitude de Potsdam. Peut-être n'a-t-il point encore pu prendre son parti. Il est difficile, Madame, à ce que je vois, d'avoir des Adhémar et des Graffigny ; il est plus aisé de s'emparer des pauvres Voltaires, gens qui ne sont bons à rien, mais qui se

donnent de tout cœur à ce qu'ils ont l'insolence d'aimer. Je suis resté à Potsdam pendant que le Roi votre frère est allé faire la guerre dans les campagnes de Berlin. Vous savez qu'il a eu un accès de goutte assez long et assez violent. Savez-vous, Madame, que pendant cet accès il mettait son pied enflé dans une botte et s'en allait faire des revues pendant la pluie? La postérité ne s'étonnera pas après cela qu'il ait gagné des batailles. Je l'admire tous les jours, et comme roi, et comme homme. Sa bonté et son indulgence dans la société font le charme de ma vie. Il a eu bien raison de dire, dans une de ses belles épîtres : qu'il était roi sévère et citoyen humain, mais il est encore plus citoyen humain que roi sévère. Ses vertus et ses talents, sa philosophie, son mépris pour les superstitions, sa retraite, l'uniformité de sa vie, son application continuelle à l'étude comme au soin de ses États, tout cela m'attache à lui bien intimement et pour jamais. Je suis bien loin de me repentir d'avoir tout quitté pour lui. En vérité, Madame, Votre Altesse Royale devrait bien l'avertir dans quelqu'une de ses lettres qu'il me tourne la tête. Il m'inspire plus d'enthousiasme que le fanatisme n'en donne aux dévots. Mais je ne lui en dis mot et il ne sait pas tout mon secret. Je parle un peu plus librement à Votre Altesse Royale de mon attachement pour elle, de mon envie de lui faire ma cour à Baireuth et d'aller ainsi d'un paradis dans un autre, mais quand? Je n'en sais rien du tout. Je suis pour mes voyages ce qu'est d'Adhémar pour la transmigration, je ne prends point de parti. Tout ce que je sais, c'est que quand on est une fois à Baireuth ou à Potsdam, on n'en veut point sortir. Vous allez, Madame, avoir une nouvelle belle-sœur. Tout se prépare pour des fêtes brillantes, mais elles ne vaudront pas à mes yeux celles que j'ai vues il y a deux ans; vous les embellissiez, et d'ailleurs, un vieux philosophe retiré doit-il se produire à de nouvelles mariées? Suis-je fait pour être garçon de la noce? Je fais des vœux en bon

moine pour les grands succès de Monseigneur le Prince Henri.

Plaisirs, grâces, amours, troupe jeune et légère,
Voltigez près du lit où ce prince est couché.
Avec vous je n'ai rien à faire,
Et plus que vous j'en suis fâché.

Je présente mon profond respect et mon dévouement inviolable à Votre Altesse Royale et à Monseigneur le Margrave. M. de Montperni a-t-il oublié

FRÈRE VOLTAIRE ?

À POTSDAM, *Juin* 5, 1752.

MADAME,

Frère Voltaire qui n'en peut plus, frère Voltaire qui se meurt, interrompt l'agonie pour dire à Votre Altesse Royale qu'il croit à présent M. d'Adhémar à votre service, il me paraît qu'il sent tout son bonheur. Pour moi, je ne suis plus bon à rien et je ne sais pas comment le Roi votre frère a la bonté de me garder. On dit que Madame la Margrave d'Ansbach est à Berlin. Il y a une Margrave que je voudrais bien y voir revenir, j'imagine que l'honneur de lui faire ma cour me rendrait ma santé. Pourquoi n'y viendriez-vous pas, Madame ? On prétend que la peste est dans le Haut-Palatinat, cela n'est peut-être pas vrai, la renommée ne va pas à Potsdam quand le Roi n'y est pas. On y est séquestré du genre humain. Lui absent, tout est enterré. S'il est vrai que la peste est dans vos quartiers, Potsdam est une vraie sauvegarde ; on enverra contre elle des détachements de grands grenadiers ; elle s'enfuira comme les Autrichiens.

Le Marquis d'Adhémar m'écrit encore pour me dire qu'il serait déjà aux pieds de Votre Altesse Royale sans une grande maladie qu'il a eue ; je me flatte que ce n'est pas la peste. Frère Voltaire se prosterne sur son grabat devant Votre Altesse Royale et devant Monseigneur.

le 12 *Juin*, 1752.

Le Marquis d'Adhémar n'est point encore arrivé, mais nous l'attendons à toute heure. Il a été malade, ce qui a différé son départ. Je crois qu'il est beaucoup plus facile d'avoir des Adhémar et des Graffigny, que des Voltaire. Il n'y a que le Roi qui soit en droit de posséder ceux-ci. Vous me faites éprouver le sort de Tantale. Vous me flattez toujours par la promesse de venir faire un tour ici, et lorsque je m'attends à vous voir, mes espérances s'évanouissent. Si vous en aviez eu bonne envie, vous auriez pu profiter de l'absence du Roi ; mais vous suivez la maxime de beaucoup de grands ministres, qui payent de belles paroles sans effet. J'ai écrit au Roi ce que vous me mandez sur son sujet. Il est difficile de le connaître sans l'aimer, et sans s'attacher à lui. Il est du nombre de ces phénomènes qui ne paraissent tout au plus qu'une fois dans un siècle. Vous connaissez mes sentiments pour ce cher Frère, ainsi je tranche court sur ce sujet. Nous menons présentement une vie champêtre. Je partage mon temps entre mon corps et mon esprit : il faut bien soutenir l'un pour conserver l'autre, car je m'aperçois de plus en plus que nous ne pensons et n'agissons que selon que notre machine est montée. Vous semblez devenu bien misanthrope. Vous restez à Potsdam tandis que le Roi est à Berlin, et vous vous imaginez qu'un philosophe ne convient point à une noce. On voit bien que vous n'avez jamais tâté du mariage, et que vous ignorez qu'un des points essentiels dans cet état est d'être bon philosophe, surtout en Allemagne. Les quatre vers que vous faites sur ce sujet, me paraissent un peu épicuriens, et cet épicurianisme est incompatible avec la misanthropie. Il ne vous faudrait qu'une nouvelle Uranie pour vous tirer de vos réflexions noires, et pour vous remettre dans le goût des plaisirs.

Le Margrave vous fait bien des amitiés. Montperni est

toujours de vos amis. Nous parlons souvent de vous; mais cacochyme, et d'ailleurs accablé d'affaires, il ne peut vous écrire. Ses douleurs diminuent, mais il les a tous les jours pendant quelques heures, et vit comme un moine pour tâcher de se rétablir. Je ne le vois qu'un moment par jour. Il faisait la meilleure pièce de notre petite société. J'espère qu'Adhémar y suppléera.

Soyez persuadé que je ne cherche que les occasions de vous convaincre de ma parfaite estime.

P.S.—Le Roi me dit lorsque j'étais à Berlin qu'il voulait faire écrire l'Esprit de Bayle. Si cet ouvrage a eu lieu, et qu'on puisse l'avoir, je vous prie de me le procurer. J'ai reçu un supplément au dictionnaire fait en Angleterre. Selon moi, il répond très-mal à son original.

POTSDAM, 17 *Juin*, 1752.

MADAME,

Frère Voltaire ne sait ce qu'il dit, il ne croira jamais ce qu'il entendra débiter dans sa cellule quand le héros de la renommée ne sera pas à Potsdam. Le pauvre homme, avec sa nouvelle de l'arrivée d'une Margrave à Berlin et de la peste à Augsbourg! Il demande bien pardon à Votre Altesse Royale. Tout ce qu'il sait, c'est que le Marquis d'Adhémar jure qu'il va se remettre à vos pieds s'il n'y est déjà. Frère Voltaire ferait bien de ne quitter jamais sa cellule que pour venir dans votre abbaye. Il continue ses vœux et ses ferventes prières, pour la santé, la prospérité, la longue vie de Votre Altesse Royale et celle de Monseigneur, et point du tout pour la vie éternelle.

VOLTAIRE.

MADAME,

Frère Voltaire, comme voit Votre Altesse Royale, n'écrit que de Dieu. Aussi est-il dans un couvent où l'on fait son salut. Il y aurait un plus gros volume que la Somme de

Saint-Thomas à faire sur la théologie dont il est question ; il met à vos pieds la thèse ci-jointe. C'est à Votre Révérence Royale à prononcer. Il y a en France des moines de Fontevraux qui obéissent aveuglément à une abesse, je me sens de ce nombre. Auriez-vous besoin, Madame, d'un lecteur, d'une poitrine et d'un esprit infatigables, théologien ne croyant pas en Dieu, savant comme Lacroze, aussi gros que lui, mangeant tout autant, très-serviable et peu cher ? Je pourrais le procurer à Votre Altesse Royale. Elle sait que je ne lui fais pas de mauvais présents, et elle peut compter sur le zèle que j'aurai toute ma vie pour son service.

J'ai exécuté ses ordres auprès du Baron de Pölnitz. C'est de quoi lui rendre la santé, et il s'en porte déjà mieux : si jamais j'ai cette santé que l'auteur de la Religion naturelle m'a refusée tout net, je viendrai sûrement m'informer à Baireuth de la vôtre. Baireuth est l'église où je veux aller en pèlerinage offrir un culte de latrie et me prosterner devant l'auguste sainte que je prie avec le plus profond respect.

Monseigneur daigne-t-il agréer mes hommages et Son Altesse Royale daigne-t-elle permettre que je mette dans ce paquet une lettre pour M. d'Adhémar ? Je suis bien touché de l'état de M. de Montperni. Votre Altesse Royale perdrait là un serviteur tel que les princes n'en trouvent guère.

À Potsdam,
24 *Octobre*, 1752.

Madame,

Frère Voltaire, mort au monde, amoureux de sa cellule et de son couvent dont il n'est sorti depuis huit mois, rompt enfin son silence pour Votre Altesse Royale. Son détachement des choses humaines lui laisse encore quelque faiblesse, et cette faiblesse, Madame, est toute pour vous. Il croit même que ce n'en est point une, et que Dieu lui

pardonnera de conserver un attachement si raisonnable pour une de ses plus parfaites créatures. Je prends la liberté de lui envoyer un petit ouvrage de dévotion que j'ai fait pour mon très-révérendissime père en Dieu, le philosophe de Sans Souci. Je supplie instamment Votre Révérence Royale de ne pas permettre qu'on en fasse de copie. Il ne faut pas que les mystères des saints soient exposés à des yeux profanes. Ce pieux manuscrit est en bien petits caractères, mais elle pourra se le faire lire par M. le Marquis d'Adhémar, ou par M. le Marquis de Montperni, diacres de son église. Je suis bien fâché d'être réduit à présumer seulement que M. d'Adhémar soit auprès de Son Altesse Royale; je n'ai aucune nouvelle de lui depuis six mois. S'il est auprès de vous, Madame, je ne suis pas surpris qu'il oublie le genre humain. J'espère toujours faire un petit voyage en Italie et voir la ville souterraine avant de mourir. Mais avant d'aller voir ce qui est sous terre, je compte bien venir faire ma cour à ce qu'il y a sur la terre de plus adorable, et renouveler à Votre Altesse Royale et à Monseigneur les profonds respects et la dévotion ardente de Frère

VOLTAIRE.

ERLANG, *le premier de Novembre*, 1752.

Il faudrait avoir plus d'esprit et de délicatesse que je n'en ai pour louer dignement l'ouvrage que j'ai reçu de votre part. On doit s'attendre à tout de frère Voltaire. Ce qu'il fait de beau ne surprend plus, l'admiration depuis longtemps a succédé à la surprise. Votre poëme sur la loi naturelle m'a enchantée. Tout s'y trouve. La nouveauté du sujet, l'élévation des pensées, et la beauté de la versification. Oserai-je le dire? Il n'y manque qu'une chose pour le rendre parfait. Le sujet exige plus d'étendue que vous ne lui en avez donné. La première proposition demande

surtout une plus ample démonstration. Permettez que je m'instruise, et que je vous fasse part de mes doutes.

Dieu, dites-vous, a donné à tous les hommes la justice et la conscience pour les avertir, comme il leur a donné ce qui leur est nécessaire.

Dieu ayant donné à l'homme la justice et la conscience ces deux vertus sont innées dans l'homme et deviennent un attribut de son être. Il s'ensuit de toute nécessité que l'homme doit agir en conséquence, et qu'il ne saurait être ni injuste ni sans remords, ne pouvant combattre un instinct attaché à son essence. L'expérience prouve le contraire. Si la justice était un attribut de notre être, la chicane serait bannie ; les avocats mourraient de faim ; vos conseillers au Parlement ne s'occuperaient pas, comme ils sont, à troubler la France pour un morceau de pain donné ou refusé ; les Jésuites, les Jansénistes confesseraient leur ignorance en fait de doctrine.

Les vertus ne sont qu'accidentelles et relatives à la société. L'amour propre a donné le jour à la justice. Dans les premiers temps les hommes s'entre déchiraient pour des bagatelles (comme ils font encore de nos jours) ; il n'y avait ni sûreté pour le domicile, ni sûreté pour la vie. Le tien et le mien, malheureuses distinctions (qu'on ne fait que trop de notre temps) bannissaient tout union. L'homme éclairé par la raison, et poussé par l'amour propre s'aperçut enfin que la société ne pouvait subsister sans ordre. Deux sentiments attachés à son être et inné sen lui, le portèrent à devenir juste. La conscience ne fut qu'une suite de la justice. Les deux sentiments dont je veux parler sont l'aversion des peines, et l'amour du plaisir.

Le trouble ne peut qu'enfanter la peine, la tranquillité est mère du plaisir. Je me suis fait une étude particulière d'approfondir le cœur humain. Je juge par ce que je vois de ce qui a été. Mais je m'enfonce trop dans cette matière et pourrais bien, comme Icare, me voir précipiter du haut des cieux. J'attends vos décisions avec impatience ; je les

regarderai comme des oracles. Conduisez-moi dans le chemin de la vérité, et soyez persuadé qu'il n'y en a point de plus évidente que le désir que j'ai de vous prouver que je suis votre sincère amie.

WILHELMINE.

À FRANCFORT,
17 *Juin*, 1753.

Je prends la liberté de supplier instamment Son Altesse Royale de daigner seulement faire parvenir à Sa Majesté cette requête. Nous n'avons d'espérance que dans sa protection. L'état cruel où je suis est mon excuse si je ne peux écrire que ce peu de lignes trempé de mes larmes.

Je me mets à ses pieds.

VOLTAIRE.

À STRASBOURG,
le 22 *Décembre*, 1753.

MADAME,

Je me regarderais comme coupable envers Votre Altesse Royale, et je trahirais mes plus chers sentiments si je ne lui écrivais pas dans cette occasion.

Mme la Duchesse de Gotha vient de me remplir de surprise et de reconnaissance, en me mandant qu'elle a chargé M. de Gotter de parler au Roi votre frère et d'implorer en ma faveur votre protection auprès de Sa Majesté. Votre Altesse Royale n'ignore pas que je n'en ai jamais voulu d'autre que la vôtre. Sans la fatale circonstance et le malheureux voyage de ma nièce, j'aurais été de Leipzick à Baireuth me mettre à vos pieds. Le mal est fait, mais est-il sans remède? La philosophie du Roi, votre humanité, vos conseils, vos prières, tout cela ne pourra-t-il rien? Qui dira la vérité à un grand homme, si ce n'est pas vous, Madame? J'avoue, j'ai écrit au Roi et je dirai toute ma vie que j'ai eu tort de m'opiniâtrer, mais, Madame, est-ce une affaire d'État? c'est une puérilité de littérature, c'est une querelle d'algèbre,

c'est un minimum, et c'est pour cela que j'ai été prisonnier six semaines à Francfort; que j'ai perdu la saison des eaux dans une maladie affreuse; que ma nièce a été traînée par des soldats dans les rues de Francfort; qu'un malheureux, qui a été seul avec elle pendant toute la nuit, et qui lui a ôté ses domestiques, l'a voulu outrager? Ces violences ont été exercées par un nommé Freitag qui se dit ministre du Roi. Le Roi ne sait pas que c'est un homme qui a été condamné à être sous la potence et à trainer la brouette à Dresde. Toutes ces affreuses circonstances sont connues dans toutes les cours, et Sa Majesté les ignore peut-être.

Pour moi, Madame, quel est mon état? Je suis vieux et infirme, j'avais sacrifié au Roi les dernières années de ma vie, je n'ai vécu que pour lui seul pendant trois années. Tout mon temps a été partagé entre lui et le travail. J'ai tout abandonné pour lui, il le sait; ne se souviendra-t-il que d'une malheureuse querelle littéraire? Il faut, Madame, vous dire la vérité! Votre Altesse Royale est digne de l'entendre. Tout le mal vient de la lettre que le Roi fit imprimer contre Koenig et contre moi dans le temps qu'il n'était pas instruit de la dispute. Je ne dis pas cela pour diminuer mon tort. J'avouerai toujours que j'en ai un très-grand, de n'avoir pas gardé le silence et de m'être opiniâtré; mais quinze ans de l'attachement le plus tendre doivent assurément trouver grâce pour un moment d'humeur. J'ose en faire juge Votre Altesse Royale. Je lui demande s'il n'est pas de la gloire d'un aussi grand homme d'oublier une faute et de se souvenir des services? Faudra-t-il qu'il reste à la postérité tant de monuments de la correspondance dont le Roi m'a honoré et de l'idolâtrie que j'ai eue pour lui, et que la postérité dise: Tout a fini par la prison et par insulter une femme innocente? Ah! Madame, n'y a-t-il de gloire qu'à avoir une bonne armée? Le Roi votre frère aime la véritable gloire et il la mérite; il vous aime, il doit vous croire; Madame, il s'agit de signaler la grandeur de votre âme et de toucher la sienne.

Faites tout ce qu'il vous plaira, je me mets entièrement entre vos mains respectables. Je ne parle pas à Votre Altesse Royale de tout ce qu'on dit à Versailles, à Vienne, à Paris, à Londres ; c'est votre cœur seul qu'il faut écouter, c'est au cœur seul du Roi que vous parlerez. Vous le toucherez puisque vous l'avez entrepris. Le mien sera à jamais pénétré du plus profond et du plus tendre respect pour Votre Altesse Royale. Votre Altesse Royale permet-elle que je me mette aux pieds de Monseigneur

Jadis Frère Voltaire ?

À Colmar,
25 *Janvier*, 1757.

Madame,

Je mets aux pieds de Votre Altesse Royale ce nouvel hommage que je vous supplie d'agréer. Frère Voltaire est toujours le même, il n'a fait que changer de cellule, il n'a point changé de sentiment, et peut-être qu'un jour le très-renommé et très-respectable père prieur saura que son moine ne lui a jamais manqué et qu'il conservera son attachement jusqu'au tombeau.

Je supplie Votre Altesse Royale de vouloir permettre que je présente par ses mains, qui embellissent tout ce qu'elles touchent, ce faible ouvrage à celui qui a été toujours l'objet de ce que j'ai pensé et de ce que j'ai écrit, et qui en est comme vous le meilleur juge.

Je serai toute ma vie avec le plus profond respect et l'attachement le plus inviolable, Madame, de Votre Altesse Royale le très-humble et très-obéissant serviteur,

Voltaire.

Permettra-t-elle que je mette deux exemplaires dans ce paquet pour M. d'Adhémar et pour M. de Montperni ?

À Maurion, près de Lausanne,
17 *Février*, 1756.

Madame,

Vous êtes de ces divinités qui ne sont faites que pour répandre des grâces. On dit de Dieu qu'il ne fait point le mal, mais qu'il le permet.

Mme la Princesse de Passau Saarbruck a envoyé à Paris certain ouvrage sur la Religion naturelle et je peux jurer à Votre Altesse Royale que je n'en avais jamais donné de copie qu'à vous seule. Le Roi votre frère ne s'est jamais dessaisi de l'original. C'était un poëme très-informe, je l'ai beaucoup corrigé depuis, et voici comment il commence :

Souveraine sans faste et femme sans faiblesse,
Vous dont la raison mâle et la ferme sagesse
Sont pour moi des attraits plus chers, plus précieux
Que les feux séduisants qui partent de vos yeux,
Digne ouvrage d'un Dieu, connaissons notre maître, etc.

Après ce petit début, Votre Altesse Royale ne peut manquer de prendre le sermon et le prédicateur sous sa protection. Le Roi votre frère ajoute à sa gloire qui semblait ne pouvoir plus croître ; il fait des traités qui valent mieux que des victoires, il écarte les étrangers de sa patrie, il affermit le trône des autres et il assure le sien. Ce n'est pas tout, il m'envoie ma " Mérope " tournée par lui en opéra. Tout cela est beau, mais il manque de m'aimer.

Que Votre Altesse Royale daigne s'amuser d'un autre sermon que j'ai l'honneur de lui envoyer, qu'elle juge entre Pope et moi. Je souhaite que tout soit bien à jamais pour elle. Je me mets aux pieds de Monseigneur et aux vôtres avec le plus profond respect et le zèle éternel de frère

Voltaire.

Je prendrais la liberté de le supplier de m'envoyer des grains de ses melons, et je demanderais la protection de Votre Altesse Royale, s'il était à Berlin.

Mais il a autre chose à faire qu'à honorer de ses melons mes potagers.

Que Votre Altesse Royale et Monseigneur daignent toujours agréer les profonds respects et les prières de frère

VOLTAIRE.

À MAURION,

5 *Mars*, 1757.

MADAME,

Que Votre Altesse Royale daigne me conserver ses bontés, que Dieu la préserve des Russes, et moi, chétif, des glaces de Pétersbourg! J'ai été tenté, un jour qu'il faisait un beau soleil, d'aller voir l'été prochain cette capitale d'un empire nouveau dont on veut que j'écrive l'histoire. Je me disais: "J'irai à Baireuth me mettre aux pieds de "ma protectrice, j'aurai des passe-ports du Roi son frère, que "je devrai à la protection de sa bienfaisante sœur." Mais le vent du nord, mon respect pour les houzards et les beaux secours qu'un voyageur trouve en Pologne, ont détruit ma chimère, et je me suis réduit à jouer le bonhomme Lusignan dans "Zaïre," devant une grave assemblée suisse. Notre troupe, en vérité, n'aurait pas été indigne de paraître devant Votre Altesse Royale.

Il y a, Madame, une fille d'esprit à Genève qui chante à peu près comme Mademoiselle Astrux, et qui est surtout inimitable dans les opéras-bouffes. Ce n'est pas qu'on joue des opéras dans Genève; on n'y chante que des psaumes. J'ai vu autrefois Votre Altesse Royale dans le goût de s'attacher une personne d'esprit et de talent. Cette demoiselle, très-bien née, serait plus faite pour la cour de Baireuth que pour Genève. Mais il ne faut pas parler

d'amusements quand tout se prépare pour une guerre si sérieuse. La cour de Versailles vient de créer huit maréchaux de France, et cinquante mille hommes défilent actuellement pour la Flandre ; du moins les maréchaux des logis sont déjà partis. Le Roi votre frère sera à portée de faire de plus grandes choses qu'il n'en a faites encore. De là, il retournera à la philosophie pour laquelle il est né aussi bien que pour l'héroïsme, et il se souviendra d'un homme qui avait quitté pour lui sa patrie. Il ne sait pas combien j'étais attaché à sa personne.

Votre chambellan, Madame, qui revient d'Italie, sait qu'on peut vivre heureux dans ma petite retraite auprès de Genève, appelée les Délices, mais il sait aussi qu'un homme qui a fait sa cour à Votre Altesse Royale ne peut vivre heureux ailleurs ; qu'elle me permette de faire mille vœux pour sa santé, la nature lui a donné tout le reste. Mais à quoi servent la beauté, la grandeur, l'esprit et les grâces, quand le corps souffre ?

Que Son Altesse Royale et Monseigneur agréent le profond respect et les ferventes prières de frère

VOLTAIRE.

le 28 *Octobre*, 1757.

Vos lettres me sont toutes bien parvenues. L'agitation de mon esprit a si fort accablé mon corps, que je n'ai pu vous répondre plus tôt. Je suis surprise que vous soyez étonné de notre désespoir. Il faut que les nouvelles soient bien rares dans vos cantons, puisque vous ignorez ce qui se passe dans le monde. J'avais dessein de vous faire une relation détaillée de l'enchaînement de nos malheurs. Je ne vous la ferai que très abrégée. La bataille de Kolin était déjà gagnée, et les Prussiens étaient les maîtres du champ de bataille, sur la montagne, à l'aile droite des ennemis, lorsqu'un certain mauvais génie, que vous n'aimiez point, s'avisa,

contre les ordres exprès qu'il avait reçus du Roi, d'attaquer le corps de bataille Autrichien ; ce qui causa un grand intervalle entre l'aile gauche Prussienne, qui était victorieuse, et ce corps. Il empêcha aussi que cette aile fût soutenue. Le Roi boucha le vide avec deux régiments de cavalerie. Une décharge de canons à cartouches les fit reculer et fuir. Les Autrichiens qui avaient eu le temps de se reconnaître, tombèrent en flanc et à dos sur les Prussiens. Le Roi, malgré son habileté et ses peines, ne put remédier au désordre. Il fut en danger d'être pris ou tué. Le premier bataillon des gardes à pied lui donna temps de se retirer en se jetant devant lui. Il vit massacrer ses braves gens, qui périrent tous, à la réserve de deux cents, après avoir fait une cruelle boucherie des ennemis. Le blocus de Prague fut levé le lendemain. Le Roi forma deux armées. Il donna le commandement de l'une à mon frère de Prusse, et garda l'autre. Il tira un cordon depuis Lissa jusqu'à Leitmeritz où il posa son camp. La désertion se mit dans son armée. De près de trente mille Saxons à peine il en resta deux à trois mille. Le Roi avait en face l'armée de Nadasti, mon Frère qui était à Lissa, celle de Tawn. Mon Frère tirait ses vivres de Zittau, le Roi, de Leitmeritz. Tawn passa l'Elbe et déroba une marche au Prince de Prusse. Il prit Gabel où étaient quatre bataillons Prussiens, et marcha à Zittau. Le Prince décampa pour aller au secours de cette ville. Il perdit les équipages et les pontons, les voitures étant trop larges et ne pouvant passer par les chemins étroits des montagnes. Il arriva à temps pour sauver la garnison et une partie du magasin. Le Roi fut obligé de rentrer en Saxe. Les deux armées combinées campèrent à Bautzen et à Bernstadt, celle des Autrichiens entre Görlitz et Schonau dans un poste inattaquable. Le 17 Septembre le Roi marcha à l'ennemi pour tâcher de s'emparer de Görlitz. Les deux armées en présence se canonnèrent sans effet ; mais les Prussiens parvinrent à leur but, et prirent Görlitz. Ils se campèrent alors depuis

Bernstadt, sur les hauteurs de Javernic, jusqu'à la Neisse, où le corps du Général Winterfeld commençait, s'étendant jusqu'à Radomeritz. L'armée du Prince de Soubise, combinée avec celle de l'Empire, s'était avancée jusqu'à Erfort. Elle pouvait couper l'Elbe en se postant à Leipsick, ce qui aurait rendu la position du Roi fort dangereuse. Il quitta donc l'armée, dont il donna le commandement au Prince de Bevern, et marcha avec beaucoup de précipitation et de secret sur Erfort. Il faillit surprendre l'armée de l'Empire ; mais ces troupes craintives s'enfuirent en désordre dans les défilés impénétrables de la Thuringe derrière Eisenach. Le Prince de Soubise, trop faible pour s'opposer aux Prussiens, s'y était déjà retiré. Ce fut à Erfort et ensuite à Naumbourg où le destin déchaîna ses flèches empoisonnées contre le Roi. Il apprit l'indigne traité conclu par le Duc de Cumberland, la marche du Duc de Richelieu, la mort et la défaite de Winterfeld, qui fut attaqué par tout le corps de Nadasti, consistant en vingt-quatre mille hommes, et n'en ayant que six mille pour se défendre ; l'entrée des Autrichiens en Silésie et celle des Suédois dans l'Ulter-Marc, où ils semblaient prendre la route de Berlin. Joignez à cela la Prusse depuis Memmel jusqu'à Königsberg réduite en un vaste désert. Voilà un échantillon de nos infortunes. Depuis, les Autrichiens se sont avancés jusqu'à Breslau. L'habile conduite du Prince de Bevern les a empêchés d'y mettre le siége. Ils sont présentement occupés à celui de Schweidnitz. Un de leurs partis, de quatre mille hommes, a tiré des contributions de Berlin même. L'arrivée du Prince Maurice leur a fait vider le pays du Roi. Dans ce moment on vient me dire que Leipsick est bloqué ; mon Frère de Prusse y est fort malade ; le Roi est à Torgau ; jugez de mes inquiétudes et de mes souffrances; à peine suis-je en état de finir cette lettre. Je tremble pour le Roi, et qu'il ne prenne quelque résolution violente. Adieu, souhaitez-moi la mort, c'est ce qui pourra m'arriver de plus heureux.

WILHELMINE.

Aux Délices,
Août, 1757.

Madame,

Mon cœur est touche plus que jamais de la bonté et de la confiance que Votre Altesse Royale daigne me témoigner. Comment ne serais-je pas attendri avec transport! Je vois que c'est uniquement votre belle âme qui vous rend malheureuse. Je me sens né pour être attaché avec idolâtrie à des esprits supérieurs et sensibles qui pensent comme vous. Vous savez combien, dans le fond, j'ai toujours été attaché au Roi votre frère. Plus ma vieillesse est tranquille, plus j'ai renoncé à tout, plus je me fais une patrie de la retraite et plus je suis dévoué à ce Roi philosophe. Je ne lui écris rien que je ne pense du fond de mon cœur, rien que je ne croie très-vrai, et, si ma lettre paraît convenable à Votre Altesse Royale, je la supplie de la protéger auprès de lui comme les précédentes.

Votre Altesse Royale trouvera dans cette lettre des choses qui se rapportent à ce qu'elle a pensé elle-même. Quoique les premières insinuations pour la paix n'aient pas réussi, je suis persuadé qu'elles peuvent enfin avoir du succès.

Permettez que j'ose vous communiquer une de mes idées. J'imagine que le maréchal de Richelieu serait flatté qu'on s'adressât à lui. Je crois qu'il pense qu'il est nécessaire de tenir une balance et qu'il serait fort aise que l'intérêt du Roi son maître s'accordât avec l'intérêt de ses alliés et avec les vôtres. Si, dans l'occasion, vous vouliez le faire sonder, cela ne serait pas difficile.

Personne ne serait plus propre que M. de Richelieu à prendre un tel ministère. Je ne prends la liberté d'en parler, Madame, que dans la supposition que le Roi votre frère fût obligé de prendre ce parti, et j'ose vous dire qu'en ce cas il vous aurait beaucoup d'obligation, quand cette idée, non pas comme une proposition, encore moins comme un conseil, il ne m'appartient pas d'oser en donner, mais comme un simple souhait qui n'a sa source que dans mon zèle.

Voltaire.

le 19 *Auguste*, 1757.

On ne connaît ses amis que dans le malheur. La lettre que vous m'avez écrite fait bien honneur à votre façon de penser. Je ne saurais vous témoigner combien je suis sensible à votre procédé. Le Roi l'est autant que moi. Vous trouverez ci-joint un billet qu'il m'a ordonné de vous remettre. Ce grand homme est toujours de même. Il soutient les infortunes avec un courage et une fermeté dignes de lui. Il n'a pu transcrire la lettre qu'il vous écrivait. Elle commençait par des vers. Au lieu d'y jeter du sable, il a pris l'encrier, ce qui est cause qu'elle est coupée. Je suis dans un état affreux, et ne survivrai pas à la destruction de ma maison et de ma famille. C'est l'unique consolation qui me reste. Vous aurez de beaux sujets de tragédies à travailler. O temps! O mœurs! Vous ferez peut-être verser des larmes par une représentation illusoire, tandis qu'on contemple d'un œil sec les malheurs de toute une maison, contre laquelle, dans le fond, on n'a aucune plainte réelle. Je ne puis vous en dire davantage; mon âme est si troublée que je ne sais ce que je fais. Mais quoiqu'il puisse arriver, soyez persuadé que je suis plus que jamais votre amie.

WILHELMINE.

AUX DÉLICES,

29 *Août*, 1757

MADAME,

J'ai été touché jusqu'aux larmes de la lettre dont Votre Altesse Royale m'a honoré. Je vous demanderais la permission de venir me mettre à vos pieds, si je pouvais quitter cette nièce infortunée, et j'ose dire respectable, qui m'a suivie dans ma retraite, et qui a tout abandonné pour moi. Mais, dans mon obscurité, je n'ai pas perdu un moment de

vue Votre Altesse Royale et son auguste maison. Votre cœur généreux, Madame, est à de rudes épreuves. Ce qui s'est passé en Suède, ce qui arrive en Allemagne, exerce votre sensibilité. Il est à présumer, Madame, que l'orage ne s'étendra pas à vos États, mais votre âme en ressent toutes les secousses, et c'est par le cœur seul que vous pouvez être malheureuse. Puissent de si justes alarmes ne pas altérer votre santé ! C'est sans doute que vous représentent mieux que moi ceux qui sont attachés à Votre Altesse Royale. Il est bien à souhaiter pour elle, pour l'Allemagne et pour l'Europe, qu'une bonne paix fondée sur tous les anciens traités finisse tant de troubles et de malheurs. Mais il ne me paraît pas que cette paix soit si prochaine.

Dans ces circonstances, Madame, me sera-t-il permis de mettre sous votre protection cette lettre que j'ose écrire à Sa Majesté le Roi votre frère ? Votre Altesse Royale la lui fera tenir si elle le juge convenable. Elle y verra du moins mes sentiments et je suis sûr qu'elle les approuvera. Au reste, je ne croirai jamais les choses désespérés tant que le Roi aura une armée. Il a souvent vaincu, il peut vaincre encore. Mais si le temps et le nombre de ses ennemis ne lui laissent que son courage, ce courage sera respecté de l'Europe. Le Roi, votre frère, sera toujours grand, et, s'il éprouve des malheurs comme tant d'autres princes, il aura une nouvelle sorte de gloire. Je voudrais qu'il fût persuadé de son mérite personnel, il est au point que beaucoup de personnes de tout rang le respectent plus comme homme que comme roi. Qui doit sentir mieux que vous, Madame, ce que c'est que d'être supérieur à sa naissance ! Je serais trop long si je disais ce que je pense et tout ce que mon tendre respect m'inspire. Daignez lire dans le cœur de frère

VOLTAIRE.

le 12 *Septembre*, 1757.

Votre lettre m'a sensiblement touchée ; celle que vous m'avez adressée pour le Roi a fait le même effet sur lui. J'espère que vous serez satisfait de la réponse pour ce qui vous concerne ; mais vous le serez aussi peu que moi de ses résolutions. Je m'étais flattée que vos réflexions feraient quelque impression sur son esprit. Vous verrez le contraire dans le billet ci-joint. Il ne me reste qu'à suivre sa destinée, si elle est malheureuse. Je ne me suis jamais piquée d'être philosophe. J'ai fait mes efforts pour le devenir. Le peu de progrès que j'ai fait m'a appris à mépriser les grandeurs et les richesses ; mais je n'ai rien trouvé dans la philosophie qui puisse guérir les plaies du cœur, que le moyen de s'affranchir de ses maux en cessant de vivre. L'état où je suis est pire que la mort. Je vois le plus grand homme du siècle, mon frère, mon ami, réduit à la plus affreuse extrémité. Je vois ma famille entière exposée aux dangers et aux perils ; ma patrie déchirée par d'impitoyables ennemis ; le pays où je suis, peut-être menacé de pareils malheurs. Plût au ciel que je fusse chargée toute seule des maux que je viens de vous décrire. Je les souffrirais, et avec fermeté.

Pardonnez-moi ce détail. Vous m'engagez, par la part que vous prenez, à ce qui me regarde, de vous ouvrir mon cœur. Hélas ! l'espoir en est presque banni. La fortune lorsqu'elle change, est aussi constante dans ses persécutions que dans ses faveurs. L'histoire est pleine de ces exemples ; mais je n'y en ai point trouvé de pareils à celui que nous voyons, ni une guerre aussi inhumaine et cruelle, parmi des peuples policés. Vous gémiriez si vous saviez la triste situation de l'Allemagne et de la Prusse. Les cruautés que les Russes commettent dans cette dernière font frémir la nature. Que vous êtes heureux dans votre hermitage, où vous vous reposez sur vos lauriers, et où vous pouvez philosopher de sang froid sur l'égarement des hommes ! Je vous y souhaite tout le bonheur imaginable. Si la fortune nous favorise

encore, comptez sur toute ma reconnaissance ; et je n'oublierai jamais les marques d'attachement que vous m'avez données : ma sensibilité vous en est garant ; je ne suis jamais amie à demi, et je le serai toujours véritablement de frère Voltaire.

WILHELMINE.

Bien des compliments à Madame Denis ; continuez, je vous prie, d'écrire au Roi.

le 16 *Octobre*, 1757.

Accablée par les maux de l'esprit et du corps, je ne puis vous écrire qu'une petite lettre. Vous en trouverez une ci-jointe, qui vous récompensera au centuple de ma brièveté. Notre situation est toujours la même. Un tombeau fait notre point de vue. Quoique tout semble perdu, il nous reste des choses qu'on ne pourra nous enlever : c'est la fermeté et les sentiments du cœur. Soyez persuadé de notre reconnaissance, et de tous les sentiments que vous méritez par votre attachement et votre façon de penser, digne d'un vrai philosophe.

WILHELMINE.

le 23 *Novembre.*

Mon corps a succombé sous les agitations de mon esprit, ce qui m'a empêché de vous répondre. Je vous entretiendrai aujourd'hui de nouvelles bien plus intéressantes que celles de mon individu. Je vous avais mandé que l'armée des alliés bloquait Leipsick ; je continue ma narration. Le 26 le Roi se jeta dans la ville avec un corps de dix mille hommes ; le Maréchal Keit y était déjà entré avec un pareil nombre de troupes ; il y eut une vive escarmouche entre les Autrichiens, ceux de l'Empire et les Prussiens : les derniers remportèrent tout l'avantage et prirent cinq cents Autrichiens. L'armée alliée se retira à Mersebourg ; elle brûla le pont de

cette ville et celui de Weissenfeld ; celui de Halle avait déjà été détruit. On prétend que cette subite retraite fut causée par les vives représentations de la Reine de Pologne, qui prévit, avec raison, la ruine totale de Leipsick, si on continuait à l'assiéger. Le projet des Français était de se rendre maîtres de la Sale. Le Roi marcha sur Mersebourg, où il tomba sur l'arrière-garde Française, s'empara de la ville, où il fit cinq cents prisonniers Français. Les Autrichiens, pris à l'escarmouche devant Leipsick, avaient été enfermés dans un vieux château sur les murs de la ville. Ils furent obligés de céder leur gîte aux cinq cents Français, parce qu'il était plus commode, et on les mit dans la maison de correction. C'est pour vous marquer les attentions qu'on a pour votre nation que je vous fais part de ces bagatelles. Le Maréchal Keit marcha à Halle où il rétablit le pont. Le Roi n'ayant point de pontons, se servit de tréteaux sur lesquels on assura des planches, et releva de cette façon les deux ponts de Mersebourg et de Weissenfeld. Le corps qu'il commandait se réunit à celui du Maréchal Keith à Bornerode. Le dernier avait tiré à lui huit mille hommes, commandés par le Prince Ferdinand de Brunswick. On alla reconnaître, le 4, l'ennemi campé sur la hauteur de Saint-Micheln ; le poste n'étant pas attaquable, le Roi fit dresser le camp à Rosbac, dans une plaine. Il avait une colline à dos, dont la pente était fort douce. Le 5, tandis que le Roi dînait tranquillement avec ses généraux, deux patrouilles vinrent l'avertir que les ennemis faisaient un mouvement sur leur gauche. Le Roi se leva de table ; on rappela la cavalerie qui était au fourrage ; et on resta tranquille, croyant que l'ennemi marchait à Freibourg, petite ville qu'il avait à dos ; mais on s'aperçut qu'il tirait sur le flanc gauche des Prussiens. Sur quoi le Roi fit lever le camp, et défila par la gauche sur cette colline, ce qui se fit au galop, tant pour l'infanterie que pour la cavalerie. Cette manœuvre, selon toute apparence, a été faite pour donner le change aux Français. Aussitôt, comme par un coup de sifflet, cette armée

en confusion fut rangée en ordre de bataille sur une ligne. Alors l'artillerie fit un feu si terrible que des Français, auxquels j'ai parlé, disent que chaque coup tuait ou blessait huit ou neuf personnes. La mousqueterie ne fit pas moins d'effet. Les Français avançaient toujours en colonne pour attaquer avec la baïonnette. Ils n'étaient plus qu'à cent pas des Prussiens lorsque la cavalerie Prussienne, prenant un détour vint tomber en flanc sur la leur avec une furie incroyable. Les Français furent culbutés et mis en fuite. L'infanterie, attaquée en flanc, foudroyée par les canons, et chargée par six bataillons et le régiment des gendarmes, fut taillée en pièces et entièrement dispersée.

Le Prince Henri, qui commandait à la droite du Roi, a eu la plus grande part à cette victoire, où il a reçu une légère blessure. La perte des Français est très grande. Outre cinq mille prisonniers et plus de trois cents officiers pris dans cette bataille, ils ont perdu presque toute l'artillerie. Au reste, je vous mande ce que j'ai appris de la bouche des fuyards et de quelques rapports d'officiers Prussiens. Le Roi n'a eu que le temps de me notifier sa victoire, et n'a pu m'envoyer la relation. Le Roi distingue et soigne les officiers Français, comme il pourrait faire les siens propres. Il a fait panser les blessés en sa présence, et a donné les ordres les plus précis pour qu'on ne leur laisse manquer de rien. Après avoir poursuivi l'ennemi jusqu'à Spielberg, il est retourné à Leipsick, d'où il est reparti le 10 pour marcher à Torgau. Le Général-Maréchal des Autrichiens faisant mine d'entrer dans le Brandebourg avec treize ou quatorze mille hommes, à l'approche des Prussiens, ce corps a rétrogradé à Bautzen en Lusace. Le Roi le poursuit pour l'attaquer s'il le peut. Son dessein est d'entrer ensuite en Silésie. Malheureusement nous avons appris aujourd'hui la reddition de Schweidnitz, qui s'est rendu le 13 après avoir soutenu l'assaut, ce qui me rejette dans les plus violentes inquiétudes. Pour répondre aux articles de vos deux lettres, je vous dirai que la surdité devient

un mal épidémique en France. Si j'osais, j'ajouterais qu'on y joint l'aveuglement. Je pourrais vous dire bien des choses de bouche que je ne puis confier à la plume, par où vous serez convaincu des bonnes intentions qu'on a eues. On les a encore. J'écrirai au premier jour au Cardinal.* Assurez-le, je vous prie, de toute mon estime, et dites-lui que je persiste toujours dans mon système de Lyon, mais que je souhaiterai beaucoup que bien des gens eussent sa façon de penser, qu'en ce cas nous serions bientôt d'accord. Je suis bien folle de me mêler de politiquer. Mon esprit n'est plus bon qu'à être mis à l'hôpital. Vous me faites faire des efforts tant d'esprit que de corps, pour écrire une si longue lettre. Je ne puis vous procurer que le plaisir des relations. Il faut bien que j'en profite, ne pouvant vous en procurer de plus grands, et tels que ma reconnaissance les désire. Bien des compliments à Madame Denis, et comptez que vous n'avez de meilleure amie que

WILHELMINE.

le 27 *Décembre*, 1757.

Si mon corps voulait se prêter aux insinuations de mon esprit, vous recevriez toutes les postes de mes nouvelles. Je suis, me direz-vous, aussi cacochyme que vous, et cependant j'écris. A cela, je vous réponds, qu'il n'y a qu'un Voltaire dans le monde, et qu'il ne doit pas juger d'autrui par lui-même. Voilà bien du bavardage. Je vois votre impatience à apprendre les choses qui vous intéressent. Une bataille gagnée; Breslau au pouvoir du Roi; trente-trois mille prisonniers, sept cents officiers et quatorze généraux de pris, outre cent cinquante canons, et quatre mille chariots, de vivres, de bagages et de munitions, sont des nouvelles que je puis vous

* De Tencin.

donner. Je n'ai pas fini. Il est resté quatre mille morts sur le champ de bataille, quatre mille blessés se sont trouvés à Breslau, et on compte quatre mille cinq cents déserteurs. Vous pouvez compter que c'est un fait, non-seulement avéré par le Roi et toute l'armée, mais même par une foule de déserteurs Autrichiens qui ont été ici. Les Prussiens ont cinq cents morts, et trois mille blessés. Cette action est unique et paraît fabuleuse. Les Autrichiens étaient fort de quatre-vingt mille hommes, les Prussiens n'en avaient que trente-six mille. La victoire a été disputée ; mais toute l'affaire n'a duré que quatre heures. Je ne me sens pas de joie de ce prodigieux changement de fortune. Je dois ajouter encore une anecdote. Le corps que commandait le Roi, avait fait quarante-deux milles d'Allemagne en quinze jours de temps, et n'avait eu qu'un jour pour se reposer avant de livrer cette bataille mémorable. Le Roi peut dire comme César : "Je suis venu, j'ai vu, j'ai vaincu." Il me mande qu'il n'est embarrassé à présent que de nourrir et de placer ce prodigieux nombre de prisonniers. La lettre que vous lui avez écrite, où vous lui demandez la relation de la bataille de Mersebourg, a été enlevée avec la mienne. Heureusement il n'y avait rien qui puisse vous faire du tort. Je vous adresse la lettre ci-jointe pour le chapeau rouge.* Pour des coquineries, il n'y en a point, pour des douceurs, je n'en réponds pas.

Nous avons eu, il y a trois jours, trois secousses d'un tremblement de terre à quatre milles d'ici. On dit que la première était forte, et qu'on a entendu des bruits souterrains. Il n'a causé aucun dommage. On n'a point d'exemple d'un pareil phénomène dans ce pays ; je vous laisse le soin d'en trouver la raison. Bien des compliments à Madame Denis. Soyez persuadé de toute mon estime.

WILHELMINE.

* Le Cardinal de Tencin.

le 2 Janvier, 1758.

Car, grâce au ciel, nous avons fini la plus funeste des années. Vous me dites tant de choses obligeantes sur celle qui court, que c'est un sujet de reconnaissance de plus pour moi. Je vous souhaite tout ce qui peut vous rendre parfaitement heureux. Pour ce qui me regarde, j'abandonne mon sort à la destinée. On forme souvent des vœux qui nous seraient préjudiciables s'ils s'accomplissaient, aussi n'en fais-je plus. Si quelque chose au monde peut contenter mes désirs, c'est la paix. Je pense comme vous sur la guerre; nous avons un tiers qui pense certainement comme nous. Mais peut-on toujours suivre sa façon de penser? Ne faut-il pas se soumettre à bien des préjugés établis depuis que le monde existe? L'homme court après le clinquant de la réputation, chacun la cherche dans son métier et dans ses talents; on veut s'immortaliser. Ne faut-il pas chercher cette gloire chimérique dans les idées vraies ou fausses que l'esprit de l'homme s'en fait? Démocrite avait bien raison de rire de la folie humaine.

Je vois une hypocrite, d'un côté, courant les processions et implorant les saints, occupée à brouiller toute l'Europe, et à la priver de ses habitants. Je vois de l'autre côté, un philosophe (quoiqu'avec regret) faire couler des flots de sang humain. Je vois un peuple avare, conjuré à la perte des mortels pour accumuler ses richesses. Mais baste, je pourrais trop voir, et cela n'est pas nécessaire. Il faut vous contenter pour cette fois de mon verbiage et de mes réflexions, car je n'ai point de nouvelles depuis la dernière lettre que vous avez reçue de moi. Ce que vous me proposez est un peu scabreux; je m'explique sur ce sujet dans la lettre que je vous adresse. J'en reviens à ma vieille phrase, que l'on est sourd dans votre patrie. Si je pouvais vous parler vous jugeriez peut-être différemment que vous ne le faites. Le Roi est dans le cas d'Orphée, si sa

bonne fortune ne le tire d'affaire. Il souhaite la paix, mais il y a bien des mais. Si elle ne se fait avant le printemps toute l'Allemagne sera ruinée et désolée. L'état où elle se trouve déjà est affreux. Quelque conduite sage qu'on tienne, on ne peut se mettre à l'abri des violences et du pillage. Je ne finirais point si je vous faisais un détail des malheurs qui l'accablent. C'est une honte, que dans un siècle policé on en agisse avec tant de cruauté. Le Roi n'en souffre point. Malgré tout ce qu'on en dit, le peuple Saxon l'aime, mais la noblesse le hait, parce qu'elle est privée des pensions et des appointements qu'elle retirait. On débite contre lui des calomnies atroces. Peut-on y ajouter foi? Elles viennent de ses ennemis. L'envie a persécuté tous les grands hommes; il faut y joindre l'animosité. Que n'est-on sourd quand elle lance ses traits empoisonnés. . . . . Encore une fois, il faut que je finisse, car je m'aperçois que je bavarde trop. Soyez persuadé de toute mon estime, et que je serai toute ma vie, la véritable amie du Frère Suisse.

WILHELMINE.

II.

LETTRE DES PANDOURES AU FRÈRE SUISSE.

Pourquoi nous nommez-vous vilains ? Nous pillons, nous saccageons, et sommes larrons privilégiés, cela est vrai. Sommes-nous en cela plus condamnables que ceux qui gouvernent le monde, que les auteurs qui dérobent les pensées d'autrui, et que les saints du paradis, qui pour fonder des églises et des couvents s'appropriaient les biens du peuple et des particuliers ? non assurément. Rendez-nous donc plus de justice, et souhaitez, au lieu de nous injurier, que les souverains de l'Europe suivent à l'avenir notre exemple, qu'ils deviennent aussi avides que nous de posséder vos lettres, qu'ils apprennent par leur lecture à devenir philosophes, et pandoures de la vertu. Si jamais nous avons le bonheur de vous attraper, nous tâcherons de piller votre esprit et vos connaissances, pour nous venger de votre mépris. Nos Rossinantes seront alors métamorphosés en Pégasses, et nous saurous bien avec le secours d'une certaine dame, qui se nomme Raison, vous empêcher de faire des neuvaines contre nous. Adieu.

P.S.—J'ai reçu toutes vos lettres, et j'y réponds à la fois. Le plan de la comédie Italienne n'est pas tout-à-fait assez juste. Mais il me siérait mal de vouloir critiquer vos ouvrages. La sœur de Mézetin n'ose se mêler que de ce qui la regarde, et d'ailleurs il est bien dangereux d'entreprendre de jouer la comédie, puisqu'on risque d'être enlevé par les pandoures ou que les rôles ne soient interceptés. Il y a plus de quatre semaines que je n'ai aucunes nouvelles du Roi.

Il se peut qu'il m'ait écrit, ce que je crois très sûrement; mais je pense que ses lettres ont peut-être pris des routes qui ne conduisent pas ici. On dit que les Français ont reçu un petit échec à Bremen, et qu'il y a eu sept mille hommes de battus. Les Suèdois sont au pis en Poméranie. Leur cavalerie s'est retirée dans l'île de Rugen. L'infanterie est à Stralsund où on les a bloqués, et où l'on va les bombarder. Voilà tout ce que je sais. Mon frère de Prusse m'a adressé cette lettre pour vous. Vous pouvez voir par la date combien les lettres arrivent régulièrement ici. Je plains votre aveuglement de ne croire qu'un Dieu, et de renier J—— Comment ferez-vous pour plaider votre cause? Si quelque chose pouvait me divertir encore, se serait de voir votre apologie. Adieu, donnez-moi je vous prie de vos nouvelles, et surtout de celles de mon amant. Veuille le ciel qu'elles soient bonnes!

WILHELMINE.

J'ai oublié de vous dire que c'est moi qui suis la pandoure. Je me suis méprise, et j'ai envoyé un papier blanc au Roi, au lieu de votre lettre que j'ai retrouvée. Je l'ai fait repartir. Si elle arrive à bon port, vous aurez bientôt réponse.

MONSIR,

J'ai bien reçu la gracieuse lettre que vous avez écrite à moi Suisse, concernant la paix générale ou faite ou prête à faire sous la médiation de son Excellence de Spada. J'ai eu une satisfaction grande que l'on commencerait par pendre plusieurs ministres, mais je voudrais un peu plus de particularité, par exemple savoir si on les pendra quatre à quatre ou six à six. Je suis grandement ébahi, Monsir, de S. M. le Roi qui court la prétentaine, et qui rosse trois grandes nations l'une après l'autre. J'ai écrit à un savant bénédictin mon cousin issu de germain pour qu'il lui plaise

de chercher dans tous ses livres s'il y a mention par hasard d'un pareil homme que S. M. le Roi et j'attends sa réponse. Je croyais avoir approché (sont à présent cinq ans passés) de lui grand homme, mais ce n'était pas celui-là, car vous saurez que celui que j'ai vu avait un visage doux, et des grands yeux bleus, et qu'il avait un esprit fort agréable, très agréable, mon bon Monsir, et qu'il disait des bons mots, et qu'il faisait les plus jolies choses du monde, tant en prose qu'en vers, et qu'il était bien philosophe. Oh! c'est celui-là que je regrettrai toujours, car je le suis aussi, moi, mais par intervalles, et j'aime beaucoup un grand Roi et qui est tout comme un homme. Je crois, Dieu me pardonne, mon bon Monsir, que j'irais le voir quand il sera de loisir, car je suis curieux des grandes rarités, mais je suis si vieux—si vieux, mon bon Monsir, et lui si grandement grand que je n'aurai jamais la force d'aller là.

Nous faisons tous les jours des prières pour sa sainte conservation dans nos saintes Églises. Tous nos frères vous donnent le baiser de paix.

Aux Délices,
27 *Septembre*, 1758.

Madame,

Si ce billet trouvait Votre Altesse Royale dans un moment de santé et de loisir, je la supplierais de faire envoyer au grand homme son frère cette réponse du Suisse; mais mon soin le plus pressé est de la supplier d'envoyer à Tronchin un détail de sa maladie.

Vous n'avez jamais eu, Madame, tant de raisons d'aimer la vie. Vous ne savez pas combien cette vie est chère à tous ceux qui ont le bonheur d'approcher Votre Altesse Royale. Comptez que s'il est quelqu'un sur la terre capable de vous donner du soulagement et de prolonger des jours si précieux,

c'est Tronchin. Au nom de tous les êtres pensants, Madame, ne négligez pas de le consulter; et s'il était nécessaire qu'il se rendît auprès de votre personne, ou si, ne pouvant pas y venir, il jugeait que vous pouviez entreprendre le voyage, il n'y aurait pas un moment à perdre; il faut vivre, tout le reste n'est rien. Je suis pénétré de douleur et d'inquiétude, ces sentiments l'emportent encore sur le profond respect et le tendre attachement du vieux frère ermite suisse

VOLTAIRE.

J'espère que Monseigneur sera de mon avis.

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